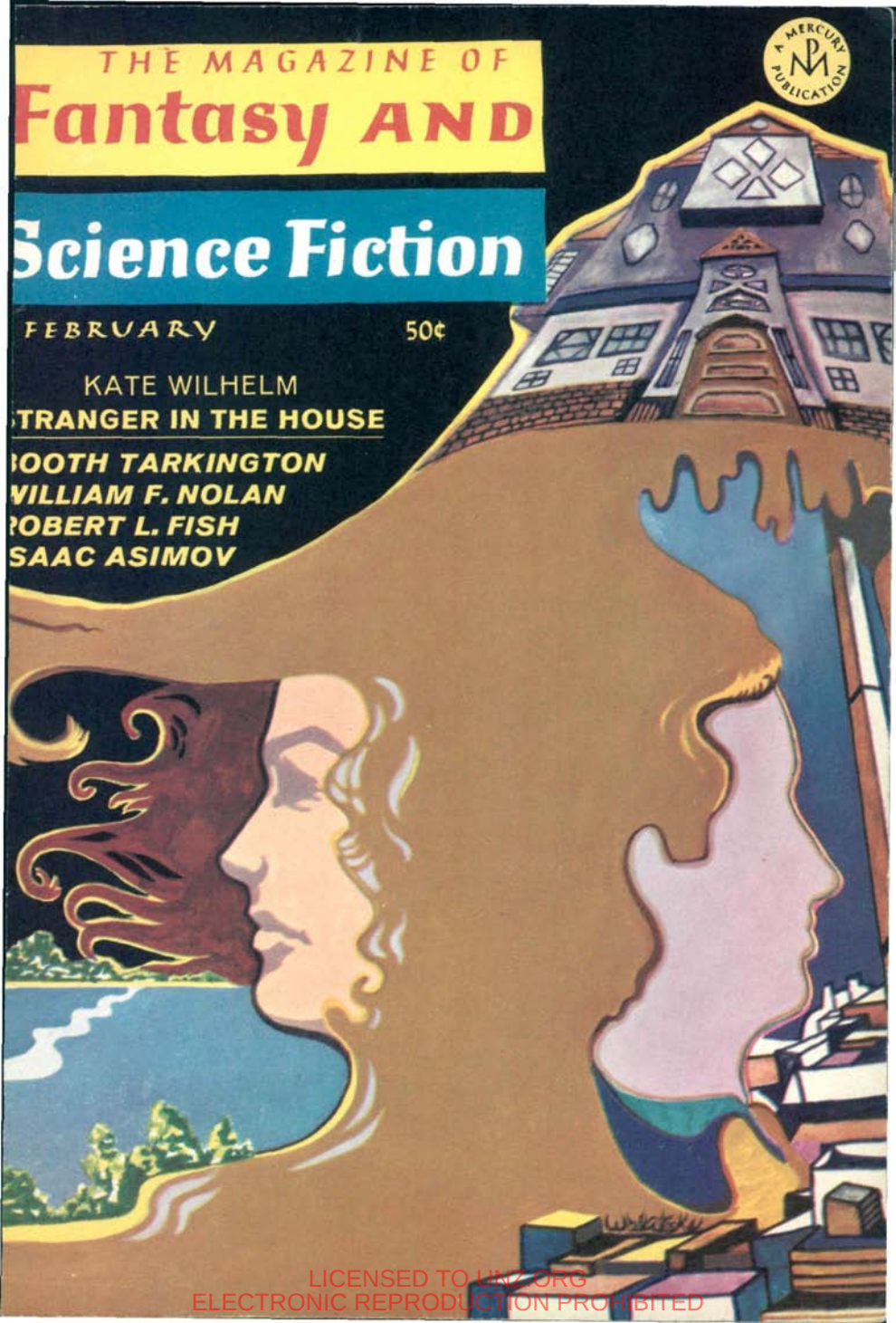

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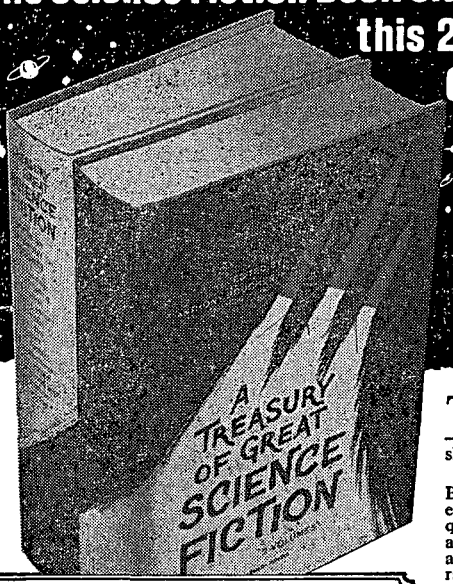

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Science fiction has been giving us an increasing number of good stories in which the imaginative strangeness of the s-f extra-terrestrial or "alien" has been blended with a more intimate strangeness, i.e., the sort of "alienation" that refers to estrangements between black and white, young and old, husband and wife. This is a story about an alien probe of Earth. It focuses on the small group of people who are directly affected, among them Mandy, who is married to Robert. Under the skillful direction of Kate Wilhelm, it is a fascinating and unsettling tale.

STRANGER IN THE HOUSE

by Kate Wilhelm

ROBERT DROVE SLOWLY UP THE driveway to the monster of a house, grinning at it happily. Mandy laughed aloud. The house was a joke played on a dignified dowager, after all. It was a three-story mixture of fieldstone and wide siding with a porch that ran around three sides of it. The original building had been constructed in 1820, it was thought, and the upper floors had been added later. There were two-story high columns dwarfing the double front doors; windows on the first floor bowed outward in pairs symmetrically spaced, and the windows above had been lined up with them. But on the third floor it looked as if the builder had fallen heir to an assortment of windows of which no two were alike in size, shape, or operation. Some opened outward, others raised from the bottom up, some were louvered, there was even a pair of skinny french windows. A funny house, for God's sake, Robert thought. On the back seat the two-part sign shifted, and the chain connecting the top to the bottom jiggled. The sign read: Phillips Insurance Agency, in colonial motif; the bottom half was starkly modern: Amanda Fash-

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ions. This weekend he would hang the sign, making the move official even if the movers weren't due for six more days.

Robert parked the car around at the back of the house. He was looking past the yard to the woods beyond. "You know, sometimes it takes something awfully big to make you open your eyes and see where you are. The heart attack did it, didn't it?"

Mandy turned to him quickly, and he smiled as her gaze searched his face. They both knew that she couldn't help it; after his heart attack of almost two years ago, she found herself studying him intently like that at the slightest provocation.

"I mean pulling out of the city like this. A country house, for heaven's sake. Us in a country house!"

"It does seem out of character. It will take getting used to, I suppose. Twenty-two years in various apartments. . . ." Mandy laughed again, and suddenly she flung open her car door and was out and running lightly toward the back door of the house. Robert followed more slowly, enjoying watching her. Mandy was small and quick, with a fluidity of motion that was like liquid. She had very short dark hair, untouched yet by grey, black eyes that snapped and gleamed and teared easily, annoying for her, but keeping them sparkling and alive looking. She was all energy and tight muscles inclining towards thinness which she fought with a diet that would have had Robert back in the hospital within a week.

Mandy hummed as she worked in the house, waiting for the neighborhood boy to arrive to help her sort junk that was piled to the ceiling in the garage. Once she looked out the window and saw Robert standing with two men in dungarees who were cleaning out the brook and repairing the dam that made a lake on the property. She watched them for several minutes, Robert so straight and Brooks Brotherish, so out of place here. She would buy corduroys for him, maybe even denims. She tried to visualize him in denims and failed. The boy arrived then.

Late Saturday night she and Robert agreed that moving was hard work. "You go on up and take a bath while I load the dishwasher," Mandy said when Robert yawned for the third time. "I'll be up in a couple of minutes." He kissed her right eye without argument and left her, yawning again. She knew that she had wanted to be alone, tired, content in the lovely house. She wanted to touch the woodwork, run her hand over the cabinets, just gloat over it. Why hadn't either of them ever brought up the possibility of moving from the city? It seemed such a natural thing for them to do. She hadn't dreamed that Robert would

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be willing to move, and probably he had thought the same about her. If he had been able to peek inside her just once during those years, he would have known how she had yearned for the country, for a yard and woods and green things growing. She stopped scraping the dishes and stared ahead for a moment, then continued briskly. There were always things about people that never came out unless they were asked point blank. Why should either of them have guessed?

But it didn't matter now. They were here and loved it. Their twenty-year-old daughter Tippy loved it, and Laura would come around once she saw it, although she was very disapproving from a distance. She was studying art in Paris. Tippy was a math major at Penn State. If only they had had such a place while they were both children at home, Mandy thought regretfully. "Cut it out!" she said to herself sharply then and clicked off the kitchen light. The living room lamps were still on. It was the only other room downstairs that was even partially furnished. She stood in the doorway studying the green frosty looking draperies, the gold and amber chairs and couch, and she nodded approvingly.

She swayed suddenly and reached out for support, and her hand found nothing to grasp. She closed her eyes hard. The room had become different momentarily, ugly, too garish and bright, shaped weirdly with abrasive angles, oppressively hot and airless. She opened her eyes again and looked about, but the room was completely normal. She felt curiously lightheaded. Whatever it had been, the attack was over. Indigestion? It had been so fleeting, long enough to close her eyes and open them again. Two seconds perhaps. She left the room and went to the wall panel of switches that controlled all the lights in the downstairs rooms. She switched off the lights, and with the darkness, she was enveloped in terror. Nothing else, simply terror. She jabbed at the switches again, and with the return of light, her moment of fear was gone. She laughed weakly, but when she turned off the lights again, she was careful to leave the hall lights on.

Robert was already asleep when she tiptoed through the bedroom. She relaxed in a tub of hot water and read a chapter in the book he had left by the tub. SCANDINAVIAN FILM MAKING. Well, he would have space now for a darkroom, and a projection room, and his collection of 8 mm films. . . .

Robert groaned, a long, loud wordless sound of pain, or protest, and Mandy dropped the book. She was out of the bath and standing by the bed with her robe around her dripping body without awareness of having moved. He was sleeping peacefully now. A dream? She bit her lip hard, wanting to

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wake him, to make certain he was all right, not willing to disturb him. . . . She became chilled then and walked slowly back to the bathroom and finished drying herself. She saw the book in the tub and fished it out. It was ruined. She dropped it into the waste basket, and then got into bed beside Robert, snuggling very close to him. She left the bathroom light on, and the door partially open.

The next morning Robert went down to the village for a newspaper while she made breakfast. While they ate they talked about the house. "Why didn't anyone live in it for the past thirty years?" Mandy asked. "People have put thousands of dollars in improvements in it, and yet none of them stayed. Why?"

"Mostly because of the thousands of dollars worth of improvements. The last guy went stone broke. If it weren't for our combined businesses being relocated in the house, we couldn't afford the upkeep on it either, honey. For us it'll be cheaper than the offices in town, but for a private family? Uh huh." He turned to the financial page then, but looked up and said, "Oh, Gus Farley said his kid got sick here yesterday. Did he eat anything?" She shook her head. "Well, Gus said the boy won't work here this summer, after all. He shouldn't have said he could. He's booked solid already."

"If we can't get any local help, we'll be in real trouble," Mandy said slowly. "We can't run a house like this by ourselves."

"I'll get a riding mower and cut the grass myself."

"If you get a go-go mower, I'll cut the damned grass," Mandy said quickly.

On Monday Mandy's ad in the village weekly was answered. "Ellen Turnbull," she said excitedly, "would like an interview on Thursday. She can start immediately."

"If she can start Thursday, let her. My God! I was dreading moving without someone to help out."

"Yeah," Mandy said. "Me too. One week to go, darling and the worst part will be over. Then all we'll have to do is find everything again."

The Groth stirred slowly with great pain and inspected the door seal when its alarm pulsated relentlessly, signaling an entry had been made. They had returned again. Every movement it made was tortuous, and it wanted only to be left alone now to die without further effort. It returned to its tank-bed, a semi-rigid material that yielded to the Groth's mass, closed itself, and released a spray that soothed, but no longer healed the occupant. The Groth lapsed into an uneasy sleep once more.

The room beneath the house was filled with instruments: recording devices, a screen that was blank

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then, listening devices, a powerful transmitter that was hooked into a translator and coder. There was a tank filled with a murky thick olat culture—the Groth food bank—and equipment that altered the atmosphere within the sealed room; the room was almost dark, like a room seen at the last light of dusk. The temperature was held at a constant, comfortable 40° F. The Groth lacked nothing to make life comfortable during its stay on Earth, nothing but the companionship of its lifemate, long since dead now. Also, the Groth was dying, and knew that the mission to Earth was a failure, and the taste of failure was bitter. It slept restlessly, dreaming of the seas on Gron where the young sported, and in the dream it was a young Groth, diving deep to catch the lifemate that teased and eluded it again and again. The seas were alive with olat, and there were no dangerous forms, and so life there was safe and happy. Its dreams repeatedly took it to the seas of Gron, and each time it awoke, the awakening was more painful and distressing.

This day it returned to consciousness with the memory of noises in the building above it, and with a resolve that one last effort had to be made. Arising from the moist bed dulled the bright glow of the resolution, and the hope of fulfilling the mission became once more the distant unattainable goal that the Groth knew it to be. The hope that had roused it returned to the seas of sleep while the Groth started the routine that it knew must be done.

It drew off its daily ration of olat, measured the acidity of the culture, added liquid to replace what it had taken and closed the tank again. It sucked in the olat and then checked the life systems that kept the bed spray at the correct concentration of sulphuric acid, and the air at the correct mixture of oxygen, sulphuric acid, nitrogen, and trace elements. The pressure was holding at a constant nine pounds per square inch, and that was satisfactory. After the inspection of the systems, the Groth turned to the information gathering equipment and began feeding the data into the translator and coder. It no longer paid much attention to the data, no longer was interested in the storms of the western oceans, and the wars of the entire globe that broke out here and there like fires spotting a dry mountain slope. Measurements were being made automatically by the equipment the pair of Groth had installed during the first ten years of their stay on Earth; all aspects of Earthmen endeavors were being watched and recorded: rainfall, wind velocities, temperatures, population changes, mining operations, construction projects, constant wars, the change in design in automotive and aircraft industries, atomic energy research, the advancing space efforts.

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. . . Every spoken language of Earth had been thoroughly analyzed by them, and fed into the computer so that there could be communication when the time came. University classes were monitored daily, newspapers scanned, radio and television programs recorded for analysis, churches surveyed and the various faiths sorted one from another, cross-indexed and cross-filed in the computer, interwoven with myths and history, so that a picture would emerge when the right Groth inspected the data and studied it thoroughly.

But only nine years after their arrival, the lifemate had been injured. Unable to believe the extent of the economic depression that plunged the planet into despair, threatening war, and the ruin of the timetable of forecasts, the lifemate had gone out to inspect personally some of the unbelievable events flickering dimly on the television screen. While the lifemate was flying over the incredible dust bowl area of the southern region, a tornado, a storm system unknown to the Groth, had swept out of nowhere, caught the tiny craft in its vortex, and smashed it to ground miles away. The terrible heat, the sun's rays, and the driving dust tormented the lifemate, desperately making repairs on the craft. By the time it was operable again, the lifemate had been mortally burned. When the Groth back in the vlen heard the agony being broadcast unguardedly, it was too late to save the lifemate. The injured Groth returned on automatic controls. It was not able to maintain mind shielding then, and the broadcast of pain had gone out into the air, into the house above the vlen, and one of the Earthmen, a female, had died, and two more had been driven insane.

The Groth had known then that it had to move the vlen away from the fragile Earthmen who proved so susceptible to its thoughts, and the following year it had started to carry out the planned move, when mysteriously, the house was emptied. The Groth waited for developments. When new Earthmen moved in above it, again it contemplated moving. It was the summer season of the planet, however, and the Groth knew the heat would weaken it, making the move more dangerous and arduous than if it waited for cold weather to begin. It settled in and shut down its shield very tight, and simply monitored its electronic devices. But the new Earthmen, child Earthmen, also wished to avoid the heat, and they played in the basement of the building, very close to the vlen. And one of the child Earthmen reached out with mental fingers he didn't know he possessed, and he felt the stranger nearby. The child Earthman screamed in terror. The Groth staggered back from the momentary, unplanned contact, shaken by the alien mind, sickened

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by the images felt through it, in agony when its own nerves responded to the glare of light seen by the child. Later the same night, the Groth was pulled from a deep sleep into full wakefulness by the sudden intrusion of an unprotected mind probing into his. The Earthman child screamed in the Groth's head, and both were sickened by the unshielded, uncensored contact. The Earthman child couldn't break the contact; there was a complete lack of control, and by the time the Groth disentangled the thoughts that were its own from those that were alien, the Earthman child was seriously ill, with a raging fever. He died within the hour.

The Groth mourned the death of the Earthman child, blaming itself for the accident, even though the child had found the way to the Groth unaided. It probed gently into the mind of the sole remaining Earthman in the house above it and the Earthman became paralyzed with shock and fear. The Groth knew then that it could never again touch the mind of one of the Earthmen, and it again prepared to move to a totally uninhabited region, far north of the present location of the vlen.

The Groth pulled its thoughts from the past to the present. There were the simple, basic problems now to settle. Earthpeople were once more in the building above it. It was being offered one last chance to salvage the mission that was of paramount importance. With the assistance of one of the Earthpeople, it might still be saved. All summer and fall it had lain on the bed, semi-aware only; it awoke each day to maintain the equipment, then lapsed back into the dream life of its youth. Winter came and the Groth knew that its own death was not far away. Its breathing was shallow and painful, unsatisfying, and the attacks of dizziness that now came to it lasted longer and were more confusing. Determinedly it again forced the past away, and it wondered if it mattered now that there were again Earthpeople within reach. It didn't know if it had enough strength remaining to it to make an attempt worthwhile now. The Groth knew that once it had accepted failure, its last acts would be of destruction. All traces of the orbiting satellite, of the space ship on Earth, of the vlen under the building, and finally of itself had to be obliterated completely once it accepted failure.

Very tentatively it reached out and found the Earthman female, and both recoiled from the touch. It touched the male later, and left even more hastily. The male was weakened by a heart injury. He must never be touched again. The Groth mused about the female, and knew it would try again to contact her.

By Thursday Mandy felt as

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though she had been running a month. She drove to the house in the country through a hard rain, but once inside the rain and wind seemed far removed. Straightening from removing her boots at the back entry, she saw an oil smear on the floor, half under the basement door. She opened the door and looked at it closer. Who could have dropped oil there? She started to touch the shiny smear, but drew back her hand quickly and closed the door again. She glanced at the phone, then tried it, but without hope of finding it operating yet. They said in the afternoon. It was eleven then; Mrs. Turnbull was due at one. There was time to measure the third floor windows and try to plan the rooms there.

The third floor had five small rooms in a row, all roughly finished: servants' rooms probably. There was also a very large L-shaped room. Room for the sewing machines and cutting tables, for bolts of materials, and accessories, shelves, work tables, everything. Besides, there was the rest of the third floor unfinished, but with rough flooring laid, and with windows. Surveying it, she gloated again over the space, well lighted, clean, warm, airy. . . . And absolutely quiet.

She stopped moving about the room and listened. The quiet was so profound that she wished she had brought a radio with her, or that they were just a little closer to a highway, or a neighborhood playground. Or something. The house seemed to be holding its breath.

She frowned angrily. She never had been timid, or afraid of being alone, or spooky. And there was nothing about the house that was frightening. It was a friendly house, a welcoming house. She finished measuring the windows quickly, whistling between her teeth as she worked.

At twelve thirty she made coffee and opened a can of soup for her lunch. The rain was driving against the house furiously now. She still didn't want to go out to the car to bring in curtains.

Mrs. Turnbull showed up as Mandy was washing her dishes. Mrs. Turnbull was about fifty, with obviously dyed red hair, the suspicion of a mustache that required frequent shavings, and legs like a football player. She had very blue eyes that darted about in suspicious glances all the time she talked with Mandy.

"You Missus Phillips? I'm Ellen Turnbull. Gus Farley says you're looking for a woman to do for you? Can't sleep in, though. Got a boy in high school, and a girl with a baby at home. Can't be off nighttimes." Within fifteen minutes Mandy had hired her.

"Can you start tomorrow?" Mandy asked.

"Be here at nine. Do I get a key?"

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"A key? Of course. But I'll have to have an extra one made. . . ."

"Give it to me and I'll do that while you're still here. You won't be here by nine tomorrow will you? When are the movers due?"

"At one," Mandy said. Silently she searched her bag for her key and handed it to the red-haired woman. Perhaps the hair wasn't dyed, she thought suddenly.

After Mrs. Turnbull left with her key Mandy realized that she had not even asked for references. She knew she wouldn't ask for references, either. Not from her. Her presence was all the reference she needed. Mandy laughed suddenly and when she lifted the phone, the line was connected. Gaily she dialed Robert's office number, and she was humming as she waited for his answer.

Robert agreed that she had done right to follow her instincts about Mrs. Turnbull. "I'll make discreet inquiries about her in the village," he said. "She sounds like a doll. Why don't you ask if her son can take on the yard when she comes back?"

Mandy hung up, still grinning, and decided to bring in the curtains and get them hung while she waited for the return of her new housekeeper. She slipped on her coat and made a dash for the car. The rain was not driving in an angle now but was still coming down hard and very steadily. She covered the draperies carefully with sheets and ran back to the protection of the back stoop, and she found that she had locked herself out. In exasperation she rattled the door handle, but the snap lock had set itself and the door was fast. She tapped her foot angrily, staring at the door, wondering how long Mrs. Turnbull would take, knowing she didn't want to wait out in the cold dampness for her. She knew the windows were all locked, doubly protected by storm windows. Then she remembered the basement door and she leaned over the rail of the stoop trying to see if it was locked also. They had left it open for the man to start the furnace, and she hadn't gone down to lock it again. She didn't think Robert had either. She hesitated one more moment; a gust of wind blew cold rain onto the stoop, and she made up her mind. She hung the curtains on the top of the screen door and ran to the basement door and found it open. The basement was warm, but musty smelling and unaired, with a suggestion of sulphur . . . She hurried down the steps and across to the stairs that led back up to the entrance at the kitchen door. Halfway up the steps she felt it again.

Suddenly the view before her of steps and the closed door changed, whirling out of focus, becoming different, unfamiliar, unrecognizable, and frightening. She clutched the rail, fighting terror, and horror. She closed her eyes hard, as the angles of the steps seemed to shift,

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becoming sharper. She thought she was going to fall, and she heard a moan. Her head was swelling, growing larger and larger, with an excruciating pain. Then abruptly it was all gone, so suddenly that she lurched forward and would have fallen down the stairs but for the reflexive clutching of her hands for support. She half sat, half lay there for another moment, trying to get back her breath, trying to will her heart back to normal. She was breathing in gasping, choking spasms that did little to restore her. Somehow she fell and clambered up the stairs to the door. As she scrambled through the doorway, her hand landed on the greasy smear on the floor, and it burned fiercely. She ran to the sink and washed it, and she was sobbing by then. Her palm was red.

When Ellen Turnbull returned with the keys, Mandy was seated at the table drinking coffee and smoking.

"Are you all right, Mrs. Phillips? You sick?"

"I locked myself out and got back in through the basement and, like a clumsy horse, I fell coming up the stairs," Mandy said. She felt her hand tighten on the handle of her cup, but what else could she say? It had been so fast, and when it was gone, she was so normal again, what else could she say?

Mrs. Turnbull regarded her for another second, opened the door to the basement and clicked her tongue. "You got mud on your shoes," she said. "Guess you slipped." She looked back at Mandy. "You sure you didn't hurt yourself? You look pretty pale." Mandy shook her head. "Well, I'd best wipe up that mud before someone slips again on it." She vanished, and presently she returned with a wad of paper toweling that she threw into the trash can. She stepped outside the kitchen door and came back in with the curtains. "You forgot these, I guess," she said.

"I . . . I'll hang them tomorrow," Mandy said. "I'm through for today. I'll go out as you do."

"What else could I say?" Mandy asked herself as she drove from the house. What could she say to make Robert understand? How describe something completely outside human experience? There were no words for it, everything was an approximation only. Strange, foreign, different, weird. Terror, horror, that was closer, but still it wasn't exactly right. She didn't know what words to use. She stared fixedly ahead and let her hands and feet operate the car, and the hour drive was over quickly. Inside their apartment, she paced; and in the end she knew she couldn't tell Robert what had happened to her. He would say indigestion, or nerves. The fall, the bruises, the terror, all the rest of it was part of a reaction to a momentary delusion she had suffered. And she had

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suffered the delusion as a result of thorough fatigue. Moving, the show, shopping, sewing, measuring. . . . She was so tired that she no longer recognized her symptoms as those of fatigue, but experienced them as something else.

When Robert arrived home, she told him merely that she had slipped on mud on the basement steps, and he commiserated with her, and later massaged her aching back and legs.

The Groth knew it should wait patiently this time for the new Earthpeople to settle into the house. It seemed assured that they would stay however, and the receptive Earthman female was back. It didn't know if it had time enough to wait. It reached for her very carefully. It had forgotten how distorted the world was through their eyes, how bright the lights were, the sharp angles they used, the shining surfaces and painful colors. It longed for the gentle seas of Gron where it could be healed, soothed by the cool waters, lulled by the gentle shapes that were dimmed with shadows and always rounded.

The Groth had learned long ago that Earthmen used light in the same manner that the Groth used shadows on Gron. There the eyes were drawn back deeply into shadows, around forms, over curves, always seeking the deepest shadow; here on Earth light was cast from objects and surfaces, repelling the eyes, making them move from one surface to another, achieving the same end: keeping the eyes in motion, forcing them to see the whole when they might settle for a part. The difference lay in the effect of the bright, shiny surfaces on the very large Groth eyes. Immediately its eyes reacted as Earthmen's eyes do after several hours on a sun-sparkling snow field. Pain, shooting lights, blindness, sometimes permanent, more often not. The Groth couldn't control the panic feeling that the surface itself was leaping at it, not merely the light being reflected dazzingly. But worse than the physical distress, there was the instant intense hatred its touch produced. A hatred like a powerful force that drained the Groth's energy. It had touched her, but she was suddenly the invading force. It freed itself abruptly, and watched the female collapse from a safe distance.

The Groth all possessed extrasensory abilities, but only a small percentage of them had also the ability to control and order the process on a high level. Training brought about facilitation of the neuronal pathways and synapses so that, in effect, the Groth's mind was like a room with an open door, safer from intrusion than any lock could have made it. The fully trained Groth would never enter the mind of another without invitation, unless it were for a medical

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purpose, or other such purpose when the mind entered was in no position to give consent. When the untrained Groth probed at the mind of one trained, it found familiar images, common elementary concepts, but no formed thoughts or organized mental conversations. There was no shock. The invaded Groth merely withdrew, if the contact persisted, and it ended there. But to be so invaded by an alien intelligence was to fill each with disturbing imagery with contorted views of the world seen differently, unfamiliar dominant fears that were irrational but inescapable. If the invading power was great, as was that which the Earthmen possessed, then there was the danger of adding shock of the Groth to that of the invading mind before the contact could be broken. Herein lay the danger; herein lay insanity.

The Groth pulled back completely to rest and think. It didn't know if it would be possible to use this female after all. Others would come; it had heard them speak of others. It would probe them before it reached a decision. It would have to use one of them, or lose a priceless opportunity.

When the planet had been discovered, Earth year 1896, Gron year 14,395, the excitement on Gron had been rampant. Never had a world been found poised on the threshold of the breakthroughs that would lead to a technological civilization within the lifetimes of the Groth. Plans were made with dispatch to send observers, and computers were programmed to estimate the rate of progress of the newly found people. Dates were given in Earth terms for the advances expected: 1965, atomic energy discovery; 1980, first satellite in space; 1995, first orbiting manned spacecraft; 2010, landing on moon; 2040, landing on nearest planet; 2150, ready for contact with alien civilization. The first Gron observation station was planned, on Earth, with orbiting skyspies, and data banks. Forty Gron years were to be allowed for this phase of the operation, with a discreet withdrawal to more distant points following that, possibly to the vicinity of the outermost planet of the system. In Earth terms, that would mean the first landing was to be made in 1920, the Groth to be picked up again in 1973. Forty Gron years, fifty-three Earth years. It was felt particularly necessary to have observers on the ground for the discovery and testing of atomic energy, when that breakthrough point arrived, but after that, when the Earthmen started to explore the nearer reaches of space, there could be no satellite of alien make in their heavens to confound them and make them suspicious and aggressive through xenophobic fears.

It was known that Earth was a dangerous planet for Groth; it was a hot world, and the oxygen-rich

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atmosphere was denser than they were accustomed to, uncomfortably dense and sticky. The excessive oxygen reacted with their body chemistry in a peculiar manner, causing them to excrete in micturation and perspiration more of the sulphur of their body liquids than was healthy. Also, the spectrum of electromagnetic waves from the star of this world was less tempered by distance—Gron was two hundred million miles from its star—so that the rays, ultra-violet, infra-red, and all between were brutal on the Groth skin, and particularly hard on the very large eyes protected only by nictitating membrane, perfect in the Gron seas, and on its cool, dim land masses, but not suited for Earth's surface. Special contact lenses had been developed, and they helped, but they were a further irritant. The alkalinity of Earth's waters proved poisonous to the Groth, another mark on the debit side. But to offset some of the dangers, it was noted that the arrogance, typical of emerging people, of Earthmen in their belief that there were no other life forms served to protect the Groth in situations where their presence might be clearly indicated otherwise. So, while the mission certainly was one of hazards, it was also one in which the gains would more than offset any of the risks, and at the end of the period allotted by the computer schedule, another great world power would be welcomed to the interstellar families. But equally important, a race going through the greatest changes conceivable would be studied for the first time. A pair of lifemates was chosen, a pair well trained in the use of all equipment, with particular skills in extrasensory development and empathy that registered in the highest range. Now only one of them still lived to carry out the mission.

Mandy wandered aimlessly about the house, one week after moving in, waiting for Robert to finish in his office, where he was closeted with his partner, Eric, and Grace who was their secretary. The house was aglow with late afternoon sun streaming in through the windows in the front, through the double door panes, and the wide windows above the door. The cold rain had given way to very mild weather. A memory stirred of the terror she had felt on two different occasions in the house. She shrugged. She had been so tired, was still tired, but not with the urgency of the fatigue she felt the past week. She looked in at the guest room that was ready for Dwight. The left corner room was prepared for Eric, who had stayed with them for two nights already. Eric was thirty, an easygoing bachelor, willing to work in the insurance office without pushing for a bigger business, although one day, Mandy was certain, when he became sole owner of the agency,

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he would expand, but easily, without strain. That was all right; she just didn't want Robert taking on any more now.

Mandy was in the hall above the offices when she heard the door open, and Grace's voice saying, "Haven't you felt anything at all, Robert? I got a flash of it as soon as I came this morning. Not strong, not really bad, but something."

"You expect a house like this to be haunted," Eric said lazily, and Grace cut in:

"I never expected a house to be haunted in my life. I didn't say I think this one is haunted. I said I felt something strange. That's all."

Eric laughed and their voices drifted out of range. Mandy moved then, going to the rail to stare down at Grace's tightly waved gray hair and Eric's too long, almost flowing brown hair as they walked side by side toward the front of the house. She looked at her watch, four thirty, cocktail time. Stiffly she went down the stairs.

She went to the kitchen where Ellen Turnbull was finishing with the tray of ice, glasses, cheeses and crackers. "Thought you might like this," she said, "with the drinks."

"Thanks. I'll take it in." Mandy said.

"Mike will come with me in the morning," Mrs. Turnbull said. "You want him to start on the garage, or in the yard?"

"The garage, I think. If he can clear out enough space to park the cars, that'll be fine." She lifted the tray, and with her shoulder against the door, she asked, "How is the Farley boy?"

"Pete Farley's seen too many TV shows, that's all that's the matter with him. He's back in school. Wasn't nothing but a stomach ache, I told you. Told Gus that too. Damn fools, both of 'em."

As Mandy entered the living room, Eric and Grace were arguing over whether or not the fireplace would heat the room. Outside the office they argued almost constantly. They were both fighting Grace's maternal instinct, Mandy had decided.

Eric said, "Let me make a fire. It'll heat. In this climate they had to put out." He, unlike Robert, was quite at home in the country setting, flannels, sweater, wool socks. He was busy crumpling paper as he talked, and he added three logs and struck a match to it. The logs were nicely dried and caught without any trouble. Soon the fire was crackling. Robert joined them and mixed drinks for them all, then sat by Mandy on the couch. The fire was warming, and with the last rays of sunlight coming in almost horizontally now, the room was very alive and cheerful.

Eric and Robert talked quietly of the problems of moving the business. Grace looked resigned. She said to Mandy, "And there's

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really been no talk about this house? I can't imagine a house being empty so many years without rumors starting, noises, lights, something."

Robert's hand squeezed Mandy's briefly, and he said, "Of course, there was Pete Farley, last week. Worked here one day and got as sick as a dog. Missed two days of school. Nightmares, nervousness, sick at his stomach, but the doctor couldn't find out why. Some say it was the house did it."

Mandy couldn't control the convulsive tightening of her own hand, and Robert looked at her and winked. He was teasing Grace, thought Mandy was going along with it. It seemed incredible to her that he didn't sense her distaste for talk like this. She took a long swallow of her drink and stood up.

"The question," Grace said seriously, "is not what others think, but what the boy himself thinks. Is he willing to come back and work here again?"

"His father won't permit him to return," Mandy said cooly, starting for the door. "I have to look at the roast, be right back."

Ellen had left, and the roast was quietly spewing and spitting, and smelled of garlic. Mandy closed the oven on it. She poured herself a cup of coffee and sipped it black, wishing Tippy and Dwight would get there. She wondered if Grace were off the subject of the house and its possible ghost, and she knew that she didn't want to talk about it, or hear about it at all. Ever.

Tippy and Dwight arrived shortly after that, and there was a noisy reunion, joking, college gossip, dinner, and the inevitable tour of the house. Tippy was small, slender, almost too thin, and very lovely with black hair half way down her back and the same long eyes that Mandy had, more heavily made up, predominant in her face that wore no other makeup. She wore a white tunic over black tights, and would have made a beautiful magazine cover girl that night. She smoked too much and had a restless energy that could become nerve wracking. She had the intuitive understanding of mathematics in practice and abstract theory that made her very impatient with anyone who couldn't understand immediately.

Dwight was twenty-four, already the author of a textbook on Spanish literature, with a doctorate in Romance literature. He worked for a publishing firm as a textbook editor. Mandy had never said it, not even to Robert, but she thought Dwight was a terrible bore. Tippy and Dwight had been engaged for three months.

Twice Mandy headed Grace off the subject of haunted houses, and as soon as Tippy took Dwight and Eric away to see the rest of the house, Mandy said, "Grace, I wish you wouldn't talk like that. Tippy

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is too young and imaginative. . . ."

"Tippy!" Grace looked at her incredulously. "That kid's not afraid of the devil himself."

"She's happy with the house. I wouldn't want you to start any doubts in her mind. . . ."

Grace looked dubious, then shrugged. "If she feels it, she'll start her own doubts. I did."

"You felt something?"

"Didn't Robert tell you?" Grace moved closer to Mandy and lowered her voice. "I'm sorry, Mandy. I was certain that Robert had told you all about it. I wouldn't have brought it up otherwise. I had a strange experience this morning. A feeling of panic, with things looking all wrong."

There was a sudden shrill scream from upstairs and both women jerked. Mandy moved before Grace did, was out the door and running up the broad stairs, and only dimly was aware of Tippy's voice, and behind her, of Grace's voice calling Robert, who had gone into his office.

"Tippy? Where are you?" The door from the third floor opened and Tippy and Dwight, followed by Eric, came down. Tippy met Mandy at the head of the stairs and threw herself into Mandy's arms. "Mother! Something . . . touched me, inside! Something . . . hot. . . " She was gasping and shivering, and Mandy's arms tightened around her, and she stared over her head at Dwight.

"What happened?"

"I don't know. We were looking at the unfinished part, and it was dark. Eric had matches, but we still couldn't see much. Tippy was near me, she started to moan, and when I touched her, she screamed."

Robert was there then, and vaguely Mandy thought that he shouldn't have come up the stairs so fast. He was too pale. Tippy was getting her breath back, and a little color had returned to her face. Mandy thought she must be rather white also.

"Good Lord," Tippy said suddenly, clearly and in awe, "we have a ghost!"

"We are not haunted," Robert said stiffly, fifteen minutes later. They were in the living room, Mandy and Dwight on the couch with Tippy, Eric poking at the fire now burning very low with sputtering sounds, Grace and Robert in the two gold chairs. Tippy was too restless to remain quiet. She started to pace, smoking fast, frowning.

"I don't know about you, Dad," she said, "but I sort of feel that I am, or was, haunted. I never felt anything like that before."

"See how contagious talk like that can be?" Robert said bitterly to Grace.

"That isn't fair," Mandy said. "She didn't tell Tippy anything. No one did."

Eric was still poking the charred

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logs. He turned and said easily, "Unless it was something on the third floor."

"For God's sake. . . ." Robert said, but Eric continued:

"Come off it, Robert. Something happened." He looked at Tippy who had stopped pacing to stare at him intently.

Robert swirled the gin in his glass, watching it. He was very angry, Mandy knew. He detested mysteries, didn't believe in them actually. Nerves or indigestion, that was his answer for anything out of the ordinary. A pill, or a checkup, or a simple act of willful amnesia, that was the solution, the only solution he would abide. Things without names, she thought, that's what he refused to admit, and those were the things that frightened. So he labeled events out of the norm and with the label, could dismiss them.

Dwight said, "Eric, let's stop all this now. It was strange and quiet and hot up there. I felt it too, but stale air and stillness, nothing more than that." Mandy almost nodded. How like Robert he was.

"Something else," Tippy said firmly. "Eric's right. We have to look at it logically and try to understand what it was." She grinned at Robert who was glaring at her and Eric. "Relax, Dad. My game, but you don't have to play if you don't want to." She turned to Grace then. "Let's compare notes. What was it that you didn't tell me? You felt something here too?"

Grace looked from her to Mandy, who shrugged. Grace then said, "I'm not sure. Something made me feel complete panic, my head hurt, and everything seemed to go weird all at once." She took a long drink, emptying her glass.

Tippy nodded. "That's two of us. I didn't know about that. I couldn't have dittoed what I didn't know. That's how it was with me. I felt something, like a hot wire in my head. Hot and moving. The match light got all twisted and just wrong, and I had to close my eyes. I couldn't stand the way things looked." She looked at Robert. "Dad, it doesn't do any good to say it didn't happen. It did. Twice."

"Three, or possibly four times," Mandy said tiredly. She told of her two experiences, and Robert stared at her disbelievingly. "I think you might have felt it, too, darling," she said. "Last weekend, while you slept. You groaned as if with pain, or fear. Then it was over and you returned to normal sleep."

"Good Christ!" Robert said suddenly. "You three women! Talk about nerves and mass hysteria! Look at what you're doing to yourselves! Just because some stupid neighborhood kid got sick and his father is a fool! Mandy, you know that's what started all this, don't you? That boy got sick. Probably

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he smoked a couple of cigarettes and got sick from them. So you let it build up to something big and mysterious in your mind, and now Tippy is feeling it, and Grace."

Mandy stared at him, wanting to believe him, willing herself to believe him. She remembered the way the stairs had gone too sharp, angled, and unfamiliar, and she looked down at her hands in her lap.

Grace stood up then, "I have to be on my way," she said. She looked at Tippy, and then to Mandy. "Are you both all right? Are you sta . . . ?" She didn't finish the question, but said more briskly, "I have to be going."

Robert saw her to her car, and while they were gone, Eric said, "Tippy, no one is in my apartment this weekend. Why don't you . . . ?"

"Will you knock it off!" Dwight said angrily.

"Oh, Dwight, shut up," Tippy said. She looked at Eric and grinned. "Why don't you go back if you think something is here?"

"Because I'm curious about it, I guess. You see, I don't believe in ghosts either."

"Well, that sums up my feeling exactly. No one believes in ghosts, and yet, there is something that we can't see, something horrible, completely terrible and loathsome. We are all so sane, so quietly, dependably, self-assuredly sane," she said, almost mockingly. "But something here isn't sane at all." She shivered and hugged herself, moving closer to the fire.

Robert returned and looked at them suspiciously. He poured another drink. Mandy started to protest that he was drinking more than he should, but she didn't say the words. They all needed an extra drink, or two.

They talked awhile; then they broke up the group, and Mandy and Robert went to their room. Robert was still angry with her, she knew, and they said little as they prepared for bed. She heard Eric putting another log on the fire, but gradually the house became very quiet. She lay staring at the ceiling, knowing when Robert finally fell asleep, after lying too stiff, and too silent at her side for a long time. She thought of the past when such anger at bedtime would have had her in tears, and the making up would have had her in wilder tears. She smiled. Her hand touched his back gently. She dozed and woke with a start. She hadn't meant to fall asleep at all. There was something that she had to try.

It was nearly three thirty when she slipped from the bed quietly. She got on her robe and slippers and left the bedroom without making a sound. Eric had left the hall lights on as she had asked him, and the shadows filled the balcony with strange shapes. The other bedroom doors were closed, and the house was still. She went down the stairs,

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and when she got to the bottom, she began to call to it, soundlessly, concentrating on the words she was thinking at it:

You! Whatever you are, leave her alone! Don't you touch her again! I'm not afraid of you now, I can face you now, but leave her alone! You understand what I'm saying! Leave her alone. Come out now that I'm ready for you. You caught me in surprise before, but I'm ready for you. . . .

She knew she could drive it away. She felt the same exultant thrill that she used to feel before a modeling show, that she still felt before her fashions were shown, the same challenge, the same awareness of her ability to meet the challenge. She waited, but the house continued silent and empty. She called to it again and still felt nothing. She walked into the living room where embers from the fire still glowed. She would wait half an hour for it. She put a log on the embers and blew on them until a tiny flame licked the log and started to grow. She sat on the floor before the small fire and waited for it to answer her challenge.

And when it did, she was not prepared for it. She was watching the leaping fire and suddenly it was there again, something groping inside her head, making it swell, making it hurt. The fire froze and the colors went wrong, became fearful and blindingly bright, bringing tears to her eyes. She blinked hard and started to rise, but the room was tilting at terrifying angles, and the walls and floor were threatening. She felt that her head was going to burst with the presence, and the pain and terror grew and became unbearable. She felt nausea rise and ebb and rise again, and suddenly she was violently sick and still the presence grew and consumed her. It was vile and repulsive, and she screamed and fell to the floor with her eyes closed, unable now to open them at all, horrified at the appearance of the room, at the threatening walls and floor and the hideous colors and the foul air. She was sick again, heaving and retching, and sobbing, and she had to get back to the vlen where it was safe. She began inching along the floor, with her eyes closed tightly, sucking in the foul air that was achingly hot now. She had to rid herself of the heavy clothing that was smothering her, and not opening her eyes she began to claw at the thick, rough material. She shrank from the contact, but with it on, she couldn't breathe. The bad air was weakening her. She bumped into something and had to open her eyes to see her way from the oppressive room. One of *them* entered, and there was much noise, and suddenly blinding lights were stabbing her. She shrieked and rolled to protect her eyes, and one of them

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touched her. She lashed out at it. Unendurable pain exploded in her head and everything stopped.

The Groth had been dozing in the tank bed when it felt the pulling of the female's mind. It was as strong as a death call of a lifemate, as strong as the fear call of a young one in the seas, as strong as the birthing call of a female lifemate. It had elements of each of them, and was as irresistible. The Groth found itself dragging its painful body from the vlen, into the bad air of the lowest level of the building, its mind engaged and almost helpless under the barrage of fear and repulsion of the female Earthman. It fell to the floor writhing and hissing in agony, and did not know that the female was also writhing above it. It secreted dangerously and became weaker, less able to ward off the death wishes of the female. Abruptly the contact was broken. The Groth was unable to move afterward, however, and lay for hours waiting for strength to return.

It thought about the decision to position the vlen so near an inhabited building, and it realized that the decision had been wrong. They should have remained in the space ship. But they had reasoned that there was a remote danger of being followed to it; also being so near the Earthpeople had been as fruitful as they thought it would be. The Groth's thoughts ranged back over the years, over all the things that had gone wrong.

The Groth had built a tunnel when they first arrived at the house and decided to use it to protect the vlen, hidden deep under the unexcavated area. The tunnel led to the woods half a mile away, emerging above ground in a dense thicket, the opening well hidden by boulders. After the death of the child years ago when the Groth had decided to leave the vlen and live in the ship, it had waited for a dark night, then had left in the one-man craft that was kept in the tunnel. It planned to bring the ship to the woods and pack it there, obliterate all traces of the vlen, then fly to the vast uninhabited lands to the north. It flew, skimming the tree tops, to the site of the spacecraft that the two Groth had hidden in a valley in the woods. They had partially buried the spacecraft, covering the mound it made with earth and stones and boulders, planting shrubs over all, so that in the end, it was impossible to see anything out of the ordinary there. By removing one of the bushes, access to the craft was simple, requiring no loss of time. The Groth flew directly to the site, and stared in disbelief. Water covered the valley. It flew to the end of the valley and found a concrete dam, flew low enough over it to make out the inscription on a plaque: Falsmouth Reservoir, N. Y. C.

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The Groth located the craft under forty feet of water, then returned to the vlen. It could get to it, but the water made it more awkward, made sealed clothing necessary, as well as the construction of an air lock. It worked on the arrangements, and on the next dark rainy day, knowing that Earthmen seldom ventured out in such weather, it returned to the reservoir. It almost plunged into the lake before it realized that Earthmen were there, hugging the shore line behind crude shelters. It searched its memories for a reason, and recalled that Earthmen hunted birds during this season. Again it returned to the vlen. The next visit was after the lake had frozen over, and again the Groth was frustrated. Earthmen dotted the smooth grey surface, fishing through the ice.

In the seasons that followed, the lake became more and more inaccessible to the Groth. It had become a favored resort area. In the summer swimmers and boaters crowded the shores and the surface of the water; in the fall the hunters arrived, then the ice fishermen and ice skaters; a ski run skirted it; chalets were built, and cabins, and a hotel. . . .

They were bad years for the Groth, still suffering the loss of its lifemate, and the remorse of having caused, albeit indirectly, the deaths of several of the Earthmen. The latent extrasensory abilities of the Earthmen had not been foreseen, thus not allowed for in the planning. If the Groth now moved the spacecraft, there would be more damage done to the emerging people, possibly more deaths. If only the lifemate were still alive; the two of them could ward off the untrained probings of the Earthmen through reinforcement of one another, but alone? The Groth knew that alone it might slip and allow one or more of the probes to pass through. It was not the skill of the Groth that was lacking, although thorough shielding required fierce concentration; it was the lack of training and control of the Earthmen. The use of a great latent power was as dangerous to the user as it was to the one against whom it was used, and if there were several Earthmen probing randomly, the Groth feared that it would not be able to withstand their combined force, nor would they escape unscathed. Many of them would die, others go mad. It could not move until the last possible moment had arrived, and perhaps by then, it would be in contact with the Groth ship due to pick it up, and a new plan would be forthcoming.

So the Groth settled back into the vlen under the house, and monitored its equipment. From time to time Earthmen had come to the house, and often building had been started, but always they had left again. In 1957, Earth

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year, the Groth made another attempt to leave Earth, and wait in a distant orbit for the ship from Gron. The Earthmen who called themselves Russians had orbited a satellite, years ahead of schedule.

The Groth retrieved the air lock bubble it had constructed years before, and donned the two-fabric suit that would allow it to work under water, waterproof on the outside, sulphuric acid proof inside, and it went once more to the lake, choosing the hours before daylight as the least likely of all to be interrupted. It slid into the water unobserved, and went directly to the space craft, now covered with several feet of silt. The Groth tested the waters, only to find them even more strongly alkaline than it had believed, and it knew it would have to work fast. There were bits of jagged containers in the area, both glass and metal, and it removed them carefully: the suit would rip with ease. The Groth swam around the ship then inspecting it, and suddenly felt a tug on its suit and investigated to find that a small barbed piece of metal was stuck on its leg. It didn't attempt to remove it, still fearing a tear, but broke the line that was attached to it, and continued to inspect the area around the ship. It located the door, and started to remove the silt there.

On the shore, a man nodding over the fishing line jerked awake when there was a tug on the spin rod lying across his knees. He reeled in the broken line and studied it intently. A grin split his face, and whistling softly, he tied a new hook to the line, added a heavier weight and a small minnow, and cast it to the exact spot where he had got the strong strike.

The Groth worked hard, and finally uncovered the metal of the ship. It was pitted with corrosion, but the Groth knew that was the outer layer only and was not concerned. It didn't see the weighted line sinking through the water behind it, coming to rest on the bottom, with the minnow swimming vigorously in circles that were within inches of the Groth's legs. The minnow twisted back on itself and got loose from the hook, darting away. The hook came to rest then, and the nylon line blended with the water so that no part of the rig was visible, except the dull hook two feet above the floor of the lake. The Groth turned to get the air lock, and as it brushed by the hook, it was snagged. There was an immediate reaction from the man on the shore, who jerked the line hard, ripping a straight tear eight inches long on the leg of the suit. The Groth felt the sting of the alkaline waters and writhed from the touch. The reaction of the water with its acidic perspiration caused steam and clouds around it, obscuring the line even more, and the Groth fumbled about with both

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hands searching for the thing that had caught it. The man tried to reel in, and again the fabric tore, but this time the Groth found the line and broke it, and it was yanked away with the sudden release of tension. The Groth was weakening quickly, and it swam back to the small craft that was also full of water now. It closed the door and started the pump, and even before the craft was dry, it started to move through the water. The Groth located the Earthman on the shore and searched the area, but no one else was there. The Earthman might be curious about what was down there. . . . He might dive down and find the bared metal of the spacecraft before the silt again crept over it. The Groth didn't want to think about the Earthman and his possible actions, didn't want to have to injure him, didn't want to have to touch his mind at all. It was getting out of the soaked suit as fast as it could, but it continued to watch the Earthman, who was standing on the shore now, staring at the water over the spacecraft. Bubbles, the Groth thought. There were bubbles. The Earthman waded out into the water, and the Groth reached out and touched his mind. The man staggered and fell in the knee deep water. The Groth made him move back to the shore, rolling him gently, then left him. The Earthman was dead.

The Groth was weakening too fast then to pay any further attention to the Earthman, to the lake, or other possible observers. It left the water, flying almost straight up, turned to the woods, and flew back to the tunnel and the vlen and the life-giving bed-tank. It lay there resting for days, hovering between dreams and reality, finding itself in the dream life on the seas of Gron, then again in the tank-bed, then again in the corrosive waters of the reservoir lake killing the Earthman, over and over.

The Groth had made its report, had sent the message aloft to the data bank in orbit, and it knew that its action would be exonerated. One of the worst things a civilization could do to another was to divert it from its own development through the premature disclosure of techniques far in advance of its own, and the discovery of the Groth spaceship would do that, so the death had been necessary. Still the Groth suffered. It decided not to try again to leave Earth unless that was the only way to avoid being discovered.

Its recovery was slow and less than complete, and it knew that until it returned to Gron and received the care of healers, it would continue to bear the effects of its exposure to the lime water of the lake, and the inhalation of the gases that had formed from the reaction of the acid and alkaline.

Events were moving very fast on Earth, and the Groth was

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forced to redesign its spy mechanisms several times. Finally it fashioned bee-like, remote controlled units that it could send to any point undetected. The unit landed on a tree when it reached its destination, bored into the trunk, and reported to the Groth all that went on within its range. This proved satisfactory, and the Groth's trips beyond the vlen became less frequent. Each trip now was a major risk; Earthmen had developed uncanny methods of detection, and there were constant sky watchers on duty everywhere. The Groth was content not to have to risk exposure, and each year the thought of venturing outside became less desirable. Periodically, however, it did fly over the lake and check on the position of the spaceship under the water, and twice it went into the lake and inspected the hull of the ship. The corrosion was increasing, but still not dangerously. The silt was much deeper, and with each year the possibility of discovery of the ship became more remote. The Groth was satisfied with the arrangement.

Then, almost ten Earth years after its accident in the lake, the Groth was again shocked into action. The data bank satellite was being scanned. It sent the message to the vlen, and the computer there interpreted the scanning as a search operation being carried out, with the probability high that all foreign objects were being sought out and marked for destruction as hazards to the fast growing space developments of the Earthmen.

Again the Groth had to go to the lake and enter the poisonous waters to gain access to the ship where it had equipment to change the orbit of the satellite. It worked quickly in the dark, but as it worked it became aware of the images pressing against its brain: fear, hatred, dread, disgust. . . . It had been seen this time. A score of men were on the shore, most of them armed, all of them certain something had entered the lake. The Groth withdrew without entering the minds of any of the men; it was enough that they were there, and that they were broadcasting to it. There was no need to probe further. It hastened its own work; its first duty was to alter the orbit of the satellite. It worked on the new course, deciding on an orbit far beyond the moon, and within an hour it was reassured that the satellite had moved out and away from the questing devices that had found it. Then it turned its attention to the activity on the shore. The men had been joined by others, and the entire south shore of the lake was buzzing with excitement. If necessary, the Groth would leave the area in the spaceship, but not yet. The vlen had to be dismantled also. It would wait and take action that seemed appropriate when the men moved.

Daylight came, and the men

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sent divers into the lake. Three of them fanned out in the direction of the ship, and the foremost of them carried a metal detection mechanism that was crude, but effective. The Groth neutralized it; the ship had been on power since its arrival in the area, so that no metal detection device yet known to man could have found it. What the Groth feared was their visual ability to spot the metal in the water where the silt had been removed for entry. The Groth continued to watch the progress of the Earthmen.

In the afternoon the divers departed, and a few surface swimmers appeared on the scene. The Groth ignored them. The next day, there were only three of the men on the alert, and at night they were relieved by two others, who were also wary. The Groth probed very gently; these two were of a different nature. It didn't want to enter either of them, so it simply watched them from a distance throughout the night. It learned that they were private investigators who made a practice of running to earth flying saucer reports. The Groth permitted itself to relax once more. No Earthpeople paid very much attention to them and their kind. The danger was much less than it had assumed at first. The following night it would leave the area. Its spy system would alert it to any danger to the ship, and it could return if it appeared necessary.

The next night the Groth exchanged water for air in the lock very slowly, so that the bubbles released would be minute, unnoticeable. Outside the ship, it waited for the silt to recover the ship, and it inspected the hull carefully to make certain that it was not visible. Above the quiet water, a faint odor of sulphur floated softly, crossing the lake, rousing one of the men who refused to admit that nothing had entered the lake. He jerked wide awake. The same smell he had noticed the other time!

He jabbed his elbow into the ribs of his companion, and together they left their sleeping bags, and crawled to the edge of the woods and watched. The first man pulled a walkie-talkie from his pocket and whispered into it excitedly until he received an answer. He hefted his rifle and waited. When the snub-nosed capsule slid from the water, spotlights flared, and there were sounds of rifle fire.

The Groth almost fainted from the excruciating pain of the explosion of light that blinded it. Planning to work at night, to fly only at night, it had not provided itself with the dark contact lenses, and it could not protect its eyes against the glare. It groped for the control to opaque the windows of the small craft, and it accelerated blindly, hearing rifle fire at the same moment; it felt the impact as projectiles struck the craft. It flew straight into the woods, hoping it

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was high enough, not able to see at all now. It careened off the topmost branch of an ancient pine tree, and the craft reeled, but didn't go out of control. The Groth climbed again. There was more rifle fire, and this time one of the projectiles did damage the craft, but it was still climbing, and no more of the shots reached it. The Groth leveled out after another moment, and still flying blindly, waited for its eyes to recover.

Several minutes later the Groth was turned and heading back toward the vlen. It could see again, blurrily, but enough. Pressure in the craft was dropping. There was a tendency to list to the left. Daylight was coming quickly now, and it knew it had to seek cover within the next few minutes or risk being seen in daylight. Also, the leak in the craft was admitting the heavy ozygenized air mixture that brought about dizziness. The Groth didn't dare put the craft on automatic in order to search for and mend the leak; the craft might be heavily damaged and the automatic controls out of coordination with the vlen. Even as the Groth thought this, the craft lurched and dropped in altitude. The Groth fought to right the craft, tilting dangerously to the left, and finally knew it had to land short of the safety of the tunnel. The craft was going to crash if it wasn't taken down now. There was sluggish response to the controls, and again the lurching drop. The Groth landed precariously in a small clearing and sat for several moments until his whirling thoughts focused once more on the problem at hand. Hide the craft in the tunnel. Get out of the thick atmosphere, back to the good air in the vlen. Two objectives. The sun came out dazzlingly. The objectives might be insurmountable.

For two hours the Groth struggled with the disabled craft, guiding it on low power around trees, over rocks, up and down ravines. The Groth wore a hood over its head, made by tearing up the protective garment and carefully peeling away one layer of material. The hood helped protect its eyes, but there was no protection against the rich air, and the heat of the sun. The air was damaging its lungs, perhaps beyond repair this time. The effects of the old accident added to its discomfort. Breathing was a torture, and the loss of body fluids was alarmingly high. The heat of the sun, poorly screened through the trees' branches, was devastating, and it excreted more and more fluids to protect its outer skin layers. The craft got away from it suddenly and skittered over the ground, bearing to the left constantly, and vanished over a cliff. The Groth staggered after it, not seeing the edge of the cliff until it could no longer stop, and it too tumbled over and down, and when it re-

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gained consciousness, some minutes later, it knew that it had broken inside.

Delirious, only half aware of what it was doing, the Groth continued to grope for the tunnel and its safety. The next time it was fully aware of its actions, it was within the tunnel, gasping and choking on the good air it was sucking in. It left the craft behind the first screen in the tunnel and staggered to the tank-bed and collapsed into it. The tank-bed sealed, bathed the Groth, cooled down to the lowest permissible temperature, and started to cure the many superficial cuts and scrapes and bruises of the Groth. The interior wounds could not be healed by the tank-bed; they required a doctor's probing thoughts and fingers.

The Groth knew now that it could not reach its ship at rest under the lake. The small one-man craft that made possible its visits to the lake had been damaged too badly to be repaired, first by the rifle fire, then even more by the fall over the cliff. It could only destroy the ship from the vlen, and with it destroy much of the lake and many of the Earthpeople in the vicinity. Then it would have to set the automatic destruct controls of the satellite, and finally eradicate all traces of the vlen and itself along with it. Or train an Earth person so that there was real communication, so that the Earth person could be sent into the lake and bring the ship out and back to the woods near the vlen. The Groth then could depart in it and leave no traces of its visit on Earth behind to befuddle the Earthmen. But first it had to train one of the wild Earth minds to communicate. It would take the same kind of orderedness that the lifemate had developed, thinking not in primal images, but in controlled symbols so that the Groth could see through the Earthman's eyes, think with his brain. It had thought the female would do, but at its touch, the female's rational brain was instantly submerged by her hatred and fear. It probed the others and found the same reaction. It brooded over the latent power they had, and their inability to use it. The female's latest assault, almost successful, proved to the Groth that they were still savages, all of them, who would kill without thought any other being they encountered. Its thoughts became more and more despairing as it rested and waited for strength enough to return to the vlen.

Mandy opened her eyes and stared about her in bewilderment. Eric's room, his apartment. She had found it for him. She tried to recall the night before, her childish challenge to the . . . thing: a blank. Silently she got out of the bed, and crossed the room to the only door, which was slightly open. She looked through to the living

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room beyond, and then she breathed in relief.

Robert was asleep in a deep chair, and beyond him there was Tippy with her dark head close to Eric as they conversed in tones too low to catch. Mandy pushed the door open more, and Tippy's face lifted and she ran across the room when she saw her mother standing there.

"Are you all right? How do you feel?"

"I'm fine. Weak, and starved, but all right." Mandy stared at her daughter and asked slowly, "What happened?"

Eric had joined them, and now Robert stirred and came wide awake in a second, with a look of fear and anxiety on his face such as she never had seen there.

"Will someone tell me what happened?" she said again. Robert caught her in his arms and held her close to him so hard that it hurt. That bad, she wondered. What could have been that bad? She pushed back gently and stared at his grey face. "I'm all right, darling. Really, all right. Relax now, okay?"

Robert didn't release her, but his arms loosened a little, and she twisted to look at Eric. He said, "We found you in a faint on the floor of the living room, near the hallway door. We couldn't wake you up, so we brought you here."

She knew that wasn't all of it, but she accepted it for the time being. She didn't know if she wanted to hear any more of it than that, not right now anyway.

"Where's Dwight?" Mandy asked.

"He wanted to go back for some clothes," Tippy said. "He'll tell Mrs. Turnbull that we won't need her today." She grinned briefly and added, "The story is that I had an attack of appendicitis, and we'll be tied up at the hospital for the day."

Eric brought coffee then and they all sipped it silently. It had to have been dreadful, Mandy thought. They were all terrified, and Robert and Tippy couldn't keep their eyes off her. What had she done?

Eric stood up. "I'll go help Dwight," he said.

"I'll come with you," Tippy said quickly.

"NO! Not you!" Mandy heard the strident tone of her voice. Her hand clamped on Tippy's wrist hard and the girl sat down again, the color drained from her face suddenly. "You mustn't go back, ever," Mandy said, forcing a normalcy she didn't feel.

"Then you do know . . ."

"I don't remember what happened last night, but I know that you can't go there. Promise me."

"I'll stay with you here until they get back," Tippy said. She looked up at Eric. "Call us when you get there, will you?"

"I'm coming with you," Robert

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said heavily. Mandy half rose and he pushed her back down gently. "It'll be all right, honey. I'll pack enough for a few days, and we can get rested and then decide what we want to do. Meanwhile, no one is going to stay there overnight again, and we won't go there alone."

Dwight saw Mrs. Turnbull standing outside the garage talking to a leggy boy whose red hair claimed him as her son. He hesitated, then went inside the house. Probably she didn't realize that no one was there, he thought. She probably thought they were all sleeping late. He glanced toward the living room, saw again the writhing figure on the floor, hissing and shrieking, and he shuddered. He had seen people acting like that in his abnormal psych lab, and he knew that sooner or later Tippy and her father would have to face up to it. Poor Tippy. He got his things quickly, then went back down the stairs. Mrs. Turnbull would have to get Mandy's clothes.

At the kitchen he called her, but there was no answer. Then he heard the boy's voice yelling. He ran outside and saw the boy racing across the yard. The tall red-headed woman met him at the door to the garage and shook him hard. The boy was pointing toward the house and talking. Dwight left the stoop and approached the door standing open, leading down to the basement. The boy and his mother came up to him. She said, "He says there's some kind of a big animal down there, dead, or hurt. He says it ain't nothing he ever seen before. You'd best not go down alone, Mister."

"There's no one else here," Dwight said, pausing at the top step. He couldn't see anything in the gloom of the far end of the basement. "Where is it?" he asked the boy.

"Way back, by the dirt cellar back there. It's breathing hard, like it's dying." He breathed hard himself. "I don't know what it is."

Dwight shrugged and started down.

"Where's the Phillips?" Mrs. Turnbull called.

"Tippy got sick, and they had to take her to a doctor," he said, remembering the story they would give out. He stopped to let his eyes adjust to the darker, shadowed area. "Where are the lights?" he called up.

"I'll get them on," Mrs. Turnbull said. "They're at the head of the steps."

Dwight walked a few feet into the gloom, and it wasn't as dark as he had thought at first. He saw nothing, but there was a curious odor in the air. Not like the zoo, but musky, like an animal in the wilds, where the body odor was mixed with pine scent, and earth smells, and sulphur. He sniffed and took several more steps. There

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were deeper shadows along the wall, around the furnace, and there was a lot of junk piled there. He saw the door that must lead to the dirt cellar and wished Mrs. Turnbull would hurry with the lights. The shadows were just boxes and bundles of rugs, he decided, kicking one of them. There was no sound, no heavy breathing, nothing but the odor. He took another step and at the same moment the lights came on.

Something screamed, a hoarse, inhuman sound of agony, and one of the bundles writhed and streaked out, striking Dwight on the leg. His entire leg burned and he stumbled, yelling also then. He rolled, trying to get away, and his hand touched it, and he screamed again with pain and fear. It was seven or eight feet long, and grey. He could see great, round eyes then, and a mouth opening and closing, uttering the agonizing cries, and long arms sweeping toward him, clutching the air with too many, too flexible fingers. He struck at it, and the thing swept over him, mingling its screams with his, bathing him in fire. Dwight convulsed in terror and pain that was unendurable; he stiffened, then went limp.

When Eric and Robert arrived, Mrs. Turnbull had already sent her son home, and the sheriff was at the house waiting for the state troopers. They reconstructed the events as best they could, deciding that there had been an animal, that it had lunged at Dwight, and in his efforts to elude it, he had upset acid on himself. They could find no such animal, nor did they find a container for acid, but, neither did they find anything else to fit the facts. Dwight had died of heart failure, the medical examiner said at the autopsy later that week, but he had suffered acid burns over most of his body.

A group of troopers searched the house, they tore open all the boxes and bundles in the basement, they examined the walls for seams that would indicate other rooms, they poked rods into the dirt walls of the wine cellar to make certain the unexcavated portion was actually unexcavated, and they found nothing. The case came to an uneasy conclusion which satisfied nobody.

The Groth had wanted only to be left alone then, but instead of peace another of the Earthmen had come. First a child, then a male adult Earthman. And the Groth had killed the male adult Earthman. Again it mourned for another's death, and again it knew there had been nothing else for it to do; their own hatred killed them.

Quiet descended on the house after a hectic period during which many Earthmen with much noise searched for the vlen. The Groth didn't sleep during that time, did-

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n't monitor its equipment; it did nothing but concentrate on keeping the probes away, keeping its presence concealed. The Earthmen left once more. And while the Groth recuperated, it made plans for the next arrival of Earthmen.

Mandy lay on the hot sand listening to the endless surf, trying not to think any more. She pleaded with something, herself? please no more, let me be for a little while, let me rest for a little while. The thoughts didn't go away. She could feel the presence of Robert, but they didn't speak then. Why don't you hold me just once, she thought, and tell me it wasn't my fault. Just once. Even if you don't mean it. She didn't know what Robert thought any more. She didn't know what she thought most of the time. If only they would get a letter from Tippy. If only she would write and let them know she was all right now, that she was having a good time, or at least a busy time. Next week they would go back to Manhattan, and Laura would return for the summer, and they had to tell her something, but not the truth, not the false truths that no one told any longer. The lies and half truths and the silent lies were so much more real than the simple truths, now that they wove stories and tried to remember the details of the falsehoods, and tripped and stumbled their way through them, and never looked directly at each other any more.

She wondered if Robert had any idea that she had overheard him on the telephone with their doctor, asking advice on her behalf. She had listened and his words had filled her with ice. Because she couldn't tell him in words, couldn't make him understand that something had happened, he assumed nothing had. The walls around other people always seemed so obvious, she had believed none existed between her and Robert. But it was there, invisible, unbreachable. The thoughts whirled and her tense body didn't relax at all until she became very hot and had to return to the ocean to cool off again.

Robert watched her walking back, and she knew that there was fear behind his gaze, fear for her, for them. They had to talk about money, about plans for the house now, about Tippy. . . . They had to talk. Maybe tonight, she promised herself. Maybe they would be able to break through the silence that had enveloped them, and worse than the silence, the meaningless chatter that they engaged in while dining or doing any of the things where silence would draw attention to them.

Tippy walked back and forth before Eric's apartment for almost an hour before he appeared. When he saw her, his face set in

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hard lines and his hand on her arm was rough. "Where the hell have you been? Don't you know your mother is almost crazy worrying about you?"

"But I told her. . . ." Tippy pulled away and looked about at the people passing them, and she said, "Let's go inside. I have to talk to someone."

Eric made her a drink and she sipped it, not knowing now where to start, what to say. She was grateful when Eric broke the silence.

"First, have you been in touch with Mandy recently? She got a letter returned after you left your apartment in London. No forwarding address."

Tippy said, "Damn, I asked my friend to save any mail until I told her where to send it. I didn't know that." She looked at the phone, but didn't go near it yet. "I'll call them in a few minutes," she said.

"Have you been all right? You look like hell."

Tippy touched her face wonderingly. She hadn't noticed particularly. She shrugged. "I'm all right, I guess. I got through the finals okay, so I must be all right." Suddenly she jumped up and went to the window and stood looking out, with her back to Eric. "What happened back there? What was it?"

"I don't know," he said. He finished his drink.

"Dad thinks Mother communicated her own nervous breakdown to the rest of us somehow, made us experience it with her. Somehow." Tippy's voice held disbelief.

"That was easier for him to accept than the thought of a ghost," Eric said. "Pathological telepathy has been written about in the journals, and even if you don't want to believe in it, it's easier to buy than the return of the dead."

Still not looking at him, Tippy said in a very low voice, "But what if he's wrong?" She turned then and her voice was vehement when she continued. "Something killed Dwight. It wasn't a projected nervous breakdown! It wasn't! He was as unaffected by Mother's attack as if it hadn't happened at all. He was beyond touch as far as her supposed telepathy is concerned."

Eric poured himself another drink, a small one, more to be doing something than because he wanted it. He said, "I didn't tell you before, Tippy. I'm sorry about Dwight. It was a tough thing for you. . . ."

She shrugged. "I don't know what would have happened with us. I think, when I can think about it, that eventually we would have broken apart, but I'll never know." She looked at her glass and drank from it slowly.

They were both silent for several moments. Then Eric said, "What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know. I feel like I have

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to find out what happened at that house, and I don't know how, or where to start. If Dad is right, it should be perfectly safe to go back, but if he's wrong . . . then something murdered Dwight, and that something is driving my mother crazy. Either way, I have to find out."

Eric said emphatically, "You can't go back there."

Tippy looked at him strangely. "Why? What do you know? Has something else happened?"

He hesitated only a moment, then he pulled papers from a drawer and began spreading them out. "I've done some investigating," he said. "The house was perfectly all right until about 1920, give or take a year or two. In newspapers at that time there were stories about strange lights, and the owners of the house wrote that they had acquired a ghost." Tippy shook her head, rejecting the ghost, and he said, "If you have only two theories presented, and you can accept neither of them, what next? You have to strike out to find a new theory. No nervous breakdown, no ghost, then what? Postulate an alien creature, and you can fit the rest of the facts into an intelligible pattern. Nothing else does."

Tippy stared at him with narrowed eyes, as if suspecting that he was joking with her. Her gaze became more concentrated, and finally she nodded. "Okay, go on. I don't know if I can believe that or not, but I like it better than a haunt."

"Right. So everything settled down again, and the house remained peaceful for twelve years. The family, a Dutch importer and seven kids, servants, relatives, were very happy in the house. Then in 1932 something happened to shake all that. According to the accounts I could find, the wife died of a heart attack and two of the kids became raving maniacs overnight practically. Six months later he moved the rest of them, simply walked out of the house one day and never came back. People were sent to pack the furniture and take up carpets, and all the rest. A year later, the property was sold to John Prentiss, his wife and her three children by a previous marriage. They stayed only two months. One of the children, a seven-year-old boy, died of what was diagnosed as acute respiratory infection at that time. The wife ran away with the two other children, and John Prentiss stayed on in the house for another two weeks. When someone came to see him, he was almost starved, practically catatonic—with grief, it was said at the time. He has since recovered, but has no memory whatever of those last weeks in the house. I talked to him."

Tippy was staring at him in fascination by then, and when he stopped, she sat down abruptly.

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"So there is something that lives in that house!"

"We don't know that," Eric said.

"And the other owners? What about them?"

"None of them even lived in the house after that. Each time it changed hands, the new owners either planned changes, or started changes, like the new heating system, and then decided against living there. I talked to only one of them, Mrs. Herschel Myers. She is beautiful, you wouldn't believe unless you could see her. Weighs at least three hundred pounds, tall, strong, fiery black eyes. She and her husband escaped from Poland, walking clear across Europe to the channel and crossed over on a raft made of saplings tied together with strips of clothing. Unbelievable. But they got to England, and after the war, they came here. In 1947 they bought the house and went to camp out in it for a weekend, and she says that she had a fight with the devil that weekend, and that while he didn't win, she knew that the house was his, and she didn't care to share it with him." He grinned and spread his hands apart. "They kept ownership of the house until 1959 when cancer killed the husband. She needed the money, or she never would have sold it. The Plainview Development Corporation bought it for an investment property, and they got stuck with it. So when your father came along, to handle insurance for the president of the corporation, he mentioned the house and its price, ridiculously low, as you know, and it changed hands again."

"If it lives there, we can find it," Tippy said softly. "We know what we're looking for—something long and grey. That's what Mike Turnbull said about what he saw."

"The official report says it was probably an injured dog down there, that it ran away after leaping at Dwight and spilling acid all over him, and that it took the container away with it."

Tippy didn't even bother to answer that. "We can draw it out, signal to it and make it reveal itself. . . ."

"How?"

"Mathematical symbols. There are constants that apply, no matter what system it uses. The speed of light, simple counting, *pi*, multiplication tables. . . . That's no problem. But how to get it to understand that we mean no harm."

"Do we understand that?" Eric asked. "Remember it killed Dwight, and it had Mandy on the floor. . . ."

Tippy paled slightly, but her face lost none of its intent look. "They were both unprepared for it, but we know what we're doing. That makes the difference."

Eric stood up and stretched. "Let's go out and have some dinner and discuss this. We have to

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be absolutely certain of what we're up to, what we'll do if it does come out of hiding, what system we'll use, how we'll recognize its answer." He took her arm and pulled her from the couch where she was still sitting, staring in concentration straight ahead. "Come on. I think that's it, but let's go over it all first. Dinner."

It was a very warm afternoon when Eric and Tippy drove from the city to the house in the country. Eric had got off at noon, and they had done some shopping, so that it was almost three when they arrived. The house looked uncared for already, the grass slightly unkempt, some leaves plastered against the screening of the porch, the draperies closed on all the windows.

Tippy shivered. "Want to change your mind?" Eric asked. She shook her head.

"Let's go inside and have a sandwich," Tippy said. They took the bags from the car, and while Eric opened windows, Tippy made ham and cheese sandwiches. They sipped beer and ate without talking. Afterward Tippy said, "Where do you think we should try first?"

"Basement, I guess. Seems the most likely spot."

She nodded. They carried the apparatus down the stairs and set up the buzzer and the recorder that Eric had bought. Tippy looked about hesitantly. The basement was dimly lighted and cool after the heat of the upstairs, and there was a noticeable lack of fresh air, but otherwise it seemed perfectly normal. They had the recorder and the buzzer on a workbench that Eric had dragged to the center of the floor. The bundles of rags and rugs had been removed, so that nothing but the bench was in sight. She started to count with the buzzer: one—one, two—one, two, three—one, two, three, four—one, two, three, four, five . . . then again and again. After the third time, they waited, Eric's finger poised on the recorder. They stayed in the basement for an hour, going over the routine six times. Eric put the recorder on automatic then, to be activated only if there were a sound. He connected a warning buzzer to be sounded in the house above if the recorder came on, and they left. Tippy was scowling in discouragement.

"Remember that we agreed that it would be pretty stupid if it came out at the first indication of awareness," Eric said.

"I know," she said. "But why should it come out? It knows that it's perfectly safe in its little hiding place, probably just waiting to attack again. I think we should burn down the house and forget the whole thing."

Eric nodded at her. If the thing was listening to them with any understanding, it would know that they were aware of it now, and

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that they could drive it out to the open with fire. Now they would wait and see.

The Groth listened and understood the reasoning behind the statement. They were familiar to it. It had learned the female already, and knew that she could not be used for its purpose. It would learn the male later, when his guard was down. It withdrew from the female reluctantly; she was very nearly suitable, but there was a hindrance in her mind that would require many long hours of persistent training to overcome, and the Groth wouldn't have the time for that. She had spent years learning to think with a certain logic that Earthmen believed was necessary to education, and the training was of the sort that interfered with extrasensory abilities. It could be overcome, if her latent ability were powerful enough, but only with time. The Groth examined again the crude apparatus they had assembled in the lowest level of the building, and it knew they would try again to contact it. Suddenly the loneliness of the long years without the lifemate overwhelmed it, and it let its thoughts curl about the buzzer and the recorder. It could communicate again, ease the last years, perhaps enlist their help through explanations. . . . It withdrew from the equipment and listened again to the words being spoken above it.

"How I would have loved this house when I was a child," Tippy said.

They were going up the wide stairs side by side, talking. They separated at the top of the steps to get dressed for swimming. The Groth followed Tippy to her room and examined it through a tiny part of her mind without intruding to the point of being felt. If she were the other female, it thought, it wouldn't have been able to do even that much. The other female was too receptive. It wished the other female had come back instead of this one. It left her then and found the male again, but without entering his mind at all yet. It couldn't afford to drive them away again. There might not be another chance if they left.

It watched them play in the cold water of the lake, and again it felt the pang of loneliness, stabbing harder this time, taking longer to banish. It visualized the young of Gron also at play in the water. It wanted desperately to enter one of the minds and feel the water on skin, but it resisted the urge and watched from the outside until they reentered the house, shivering.

"You go shower and get something on and I'll make a fire," Eric said. "Then it'll be time to try the beast again."

"Be right down," Tippy said. When she returned, she had her hair wrapped in a towel. It was almost six.

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"Drink?" Eric asked.

She shook her head. "Coffee, maybe." She went out to the kitchen to make it, and Eric followed her.

"You don't seem at all alarmed by being here," he said.

"I know. It's that old, it-can't-happen-to-me syndrome." The coffee was starting to perk. "Let's go down and try it again now," she said.

The Groth watched and listened while they buzzed and waited, and it wanted to answer them. As long as they had been unaware of its presence, it had been easy to think of them almost as animals, at least sub-intelligent, but now they were suddenly communicating beings. And the Groth was so lonely.

"It isn't going to answer us, is it?" Tippy said, in the living room again. She was brushing her hair, drying it before the fire.

"I don't know."

"It isn't. Let's not go to the restaurant like we planned. I'll make us something here." She kept her gaze on the flickering fire. Eric stared at her for several moments before he answered.

"We promised each other that we would stick to the plan we made," he said slowly. "That was one of the conditions, remember?"

"I know, but. . . . Look, it took us days to make up our minds to try this. Why should we expect it to make up its mind within minutes, or even hours, to answer our signal? I hadn't thought of that until now. We have to give it a chance."

Eric lit a cigarette and studied it intently. "Have you felt anything at all?"

"Nothing. Unless just a little bit foolish."

He grinned at that. "Yeah. I know. Okay, we'll eat in. But the rest of the plan stays unchanged. No arguing about the motel later. Okay?"

"Sure."

The Groth continued to listen to them, and it came to understand that they were going away again later. It sank down in the tank thinking furiously. They couldn't leave now. It could communicate with them and possibly hold them that way. But they might have planned to call in authorities if it made such a move. It would have to probe to learn what their plans actually were. It sighed.

Tippy talked as she prepared their dinner, and once when she looked up from the pot she was stirring, she caught Eric's gaze on her in a look that made her stop completely. She turned back to the stove in confusion.

"It's okay," Eric said, as she stirred vigorously. "Relax."

"I don't know what you mean."

"You know exactly what I mean. And you're stirring gravy out all over the stove."

She moved the pan. "It's not gravy. It's spaghetti sauce. You're

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too old for me." She looked him up and down. "You're my father's partner."

Eric laughed. "If you haven't burned the sauce completely, let's eat."

She laughed too then, and knew that he wasn't too old at all.

The Groth continued to watch them as they chatted and relaxed. The male was the one to probe for the plans they had made. He would not alarm as easily as the female who had felt the probe once before. It waited until they were again comfortable before the fire, and it began to send peaceful rhythms and harmonies at them, such as were used for the Groth young. The male became wary and uneasy. The Groth withdrew. They had used sequence in their abortive attempt to contact it; perhaps sequence would quiet them. It sent a slower cadence at them, and this was useful. The male relaxed again. When the Groth touched his mind, however, the male stiffened and sent hate and panic thoughts, and the rational mind was totally submerged. The Groth withdrew hurriedly before it was damaged again by the emotions of the Earthpeople.

"Eric! Are you all right? What happened?" Tippy shook him hard.

"It's gone now, I think. I . . . I guess I know what you felt before." Eric felt shaken and curiously ashamed. His reaction had been so uncontrolled; the hatred that had poured over him left him shaken. "It's here," he said. His voice was too tight and flat. "And we've got to find it and destroy it. A thing like that can't go on living in the same world with men and women. It's pure evil."

Tippy stared at him. "Let's go," she said. "It . . . it killed Dwight, and almost killed mother. I don't know why we thought we could. . . . Let's go!"

Her voice rose and Eric nodded.

The Groth couldn't let them leave. It was still shuddering from the emotional shock of the male's mind, but it knew that if they left now, there would be no future hope in time to save the mission. Its only hope for personal survival as well as the success of its mission was to get into space beyond the reach of Earthmen and go into suspended animation and await the Gron ship. It had to have their help. It reached out for the male. They were in the back of the building, near the outside door. It touched the male very easily, trying to do little damage and still hold him. The male fell down. The Groth knew that he was not dead, but in a deep trance-like state from which he would not awaken for hours. The female was screaming hysterically. She was not moving, simply screaming. The Groth retreated from her unvoiced screams: she was calling her mother and father. Not using her voice, not even knowing that she was calling

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them, she was screaming over and over for her mother and father. Then for her mother only. The Groth tried to be even more gentle with her than it had been with the male, but she too fell unconscious to the floor. The Groth felt its strength ebbing, and knew that again the contact had hurt it. It sank down into its tank. It was excreting alarmingly. It needed time to rest. The male and female would not stir now, and the Groth could rest. It let its mind go slack, and the too accessible dreams came and lulled it to sleep.

Mandy sat straight up, a questioning look on her face. Tippy? She started for the apartment door, then stopped in confusion. She heard it again. Or felt it. Tippy! But where? Robert coughed in the other room, and she turned to go to him, to ask if he heard, but again she stopped. She was shaking hard suddenly, and her legs were weak; she almost fell before she got back to her chair. Was she really having a breakdown then? Voices in her head. A thrill of fear stirred in her loins, and vividly she recalled another time that she had heard Tippy's voice in her head. She had run out the door in time to jump into the front seat of the rolling car and put her foot on the brake before it had rolled backward off the road and over a cliff. Tippy was sitting without motion or sound on the front seat, four years old, terrified at what she had done. It was the same feeling now.

Where are you? She cried silently, and there was no answer. Nothing was there now, but her own fear. Slowly, still unsteady, she rose and started toward the door. She looked back at the bedroom door, but didn't tell Robert anything. He was reading in bed, would fall asleep soon, never realize that she was out. If she told him, he would try to stop her; he would stop her. She bit her lip hard and blinked back the tears that had come to her eyes. But it wasn't his fault. He simply couldn't stand things that didn't have explanations, and this didn't. She had to go out. She didn't know where she was going, but she had to get started.

She got the car from the building parking lot and started up the West Side Drive, still with no destination. She drove steadily and when she crossed the Tappan Zee Bridge, it was as if she had known from the start that she was going to the house. She didn't pause when the realization struck her.

She was not surprised to see the house lighted, with Eric's car in the driveway. She went to the kitchen door as if drawn there, and was not surprised to see the couple sprawled on the floor. She knelt by Tippy and felt her pulse, then Eric's. They were both unconscious only. She was starting for the telephone when she felt it.

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The Groth woke with a start, chagrined to find that it had been dozing. The other female was there. The Groth had learned the way into her, but it hesitated, knowing that it had to use great caution, afraid that she would go into shock again at its touch. It used a probe that was as gentle and loving as the exploratory probe of a lifemate in its first contact.

Mandy moaned and clutched her head swaying. Please, she whimpered, not again. Please. The fire spread and she began to weep. The Groth was swept by anguish waves that loosened its control momentarily, and it got the force of her fear like a battering ram against its own brain. It concentrated on symbols that she could understand and found the intelligent part of her brain out of reach, dominated by the savage, uncontrollable sub-brain. It was like fighting a horde of demons that swirled out of focus to merge with one another and assume shapes even more frightening. She had closed her eyes tight at the first touch, but suddenly she opened them wide, and the Groth shrank back from the glare of the room where she was. She was sobbing and calling to it to go away. The Groth knew then that it had to take full control, whether or not she was damaged. Deep in the vlen the Groth closed its eyes against the pain of too bright light, and Mandy's eyes closed also. It willed its breathing to become slower and more regular, and her sobbing eased. The Groth knew that she would have to use its suit to withstand the sulphur atmosphere in the ship. She would need oxygen also, but that would be found at the lake. This was not what it had wanted. This was a criminal act. There was no cooperation, but simply control.

Slowly, like a sleepwalker, Mandy started for the basement steps. She was still clutching her bag. She crossed the basement and waited until she was taken inside the wine cellar to find a garment there. She dropped the bag when she picked up the suit, and she turned and retraced her steps up and out of the house to her car. Her keys were still in the ignition. Her hand reached for the key, and she opened her eyes wide and started to tremble. The horror in her mind penetrated her understanding a little; she screamed and looked about wildly. Then it was back, the burning, crawling thing in her brain was there again. The look of near comprehension was replaced by the blankness of a somnambule, and she turned on the ignition and backed to make her turn and leave.

The Groth's body went hot with the realization that it had nearly lost her. It shivered in the tank and forced concentration back in full force. If only it hadn't been so weakened by injuries and the

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destructive invasions of its mind by the eroding hatred of the Earth-people. . . . It had tried to find out from her mind the location of the lake, going to it by road, and in doing so, it had loosened its grip on the hind brain that was now guiding her every action. It had to rely on her own knowledge to get her there, hoping that she knew the way without direction. If only it could deal directly with her rational mind, but in the Earthmen, the rational mind was forever in danger of being eclipsed by the irrational hind-brain that allowed no hope of intelligent behavior. The Groth strained to maintain the contact as distance separated it from the female, and with each mile, the difficulty increased. It was totally unware of the stirring of the male in the building above it.

Eric felt as though his head were split wide open. He opened his eyes warily and concentrated on puzzling out what the strange noise was that he was hearing. Then he remembered. He sat up too fast and was punished by a stab of pain. Tippy! She stirred and moaned at his touch, and only then did he realize he was hearing the buzzer they had rigged to the recorder in the basement.

"Tippy, snap out of it! Come on. You're okay. It's gone now."

She opened her eyes and panic came through until she saw Eric bending over her. She looked past him, then searched the rest of the kitchen in a quick glance. "What. . . . The alarm! It's out!"

"I don't know what the hell's been going on," Eric said. He hauled her to her feet and pushed her toward the door. "Go get in the car and start it. I'm going to take a quick look in the basement."

Tippy drew back and held his arm. "Not alone," she said. "Let me stay with you."

Eric scowled, but together they went to the small entry at the back door and stared at the basement door standing open.

"I closed it," he said softly. "I remember that I closed it." They stared down the stairs and finally he said, "Oh, hell. I'm going to get the recorder and bring it up to see what we got. That fool buzzer is driving me out of my mind."

The buzzer stopped abruptly when he grabbed the recorder from the bench and ran back to the stairs. "The door to the wine cellar is open," he said as he rewound the tape to the start position. He turned it to play and they listened. There was a creaking noise, a soft thud of something falling, then nothing for a long time. Eric turned it faster so that the tape spun through, but still nothing was on it until pounding steps came through and the silence of having the recorder stopped.

Tippy stared at it in bewilderment. "Once more," she said. When the creaking finished she

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stopped the recorder. "That's the door to the wine cellar. It sticks every time. Something came out . . ."

"Or went in."

"Then the thud." She started it again and stopped it when the dropping noise played. "What. . . . We'll have to go down to find out, won't we?"

They went down and crossed the floor to the wine cellar. Tippy screamed when she saw what had made the thud.

"It's mother's bag! It took her inside with it!"

Eric got Tippy back up to the kitchen, then called Robert. To Tippy he said, "He's looking around for her. She didn't say anything about leaving." He listened again, then said slowly, "You'd better get out to the house. Mandy's been here, but there's no car here now." He agreed to call the state police and hung up.

The troopers put out an alert for Mandy's car, and then started another search of the house, as fruitless as their previous search had been. The Groth became aware of the probing in the wine cellar, and Mandy almost skidded off the road. It turned its full attention to her again. Mandy was driving well, but too fast. She slowed down. Each moment for her was sufficient to itself; there was no future, no past. It was exactly like a dream in which anything can be accepted no matter how unrelated it is to anything else. She performed well, obeyed traffic laws, was careful at intersections, and had no thought about where she was going, or why. She was driving, and that was enough. Now and again there was a flash of terror and repulsion, but always it was banished very quickly, and she no longer was aware of any physical discomfort. The Groth was delighted with the facilitation that had been accomplished so quickly. It knew that the experiences it had shared with her before had made this contact possible, and it wasn't deceived into thinking it could yet communicate with her rational mind directly. Trying that would set up such an inner conflict within her that she probably would be lost to it. It listened briefly to the searchers, and now there was added a new silent voice calling her, through the Groth, reaching for her. It tried to shut out the mental cries, and succeeded only partially. It felt the impact on the female and redoubled its efforts to keep her under control.

She drove north on secondary roads until she turned to a narrow blacktop road that led to the south shore of the lake.

The Groth felt the agonized call again and again, and it knew it had to still the silent voice bombarding its brain. Mandy's car swerved and braked hard. "No!" she screamed, aloud and in her mind. She pulled away from the

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Groth, and there was a meaningless jumble where there had been order in her mind. She had understood its thought! The Groth brought her back, but not fully yet, and both felt the struggle as she fought to stay free. She was nearly hysterical with her effort, and the Groth was excreting so dangerously that it feared unconsciousness would end the battle. The Groth understood that it was her lifemate who was calling to her through it, and it knew that it could not harm the lifemate and still keep the female under control. With the understanding that reached the Groth, the female became compliant again and resumed the drive toward the lake.

Mandy saw the black water before her and turned left. That was the way. She would need diving gear. That she had never dived before didn't occur to her then. She would need a tank of oxygen in order to clear the door and attach the air lock, and to breathe after she had got inside the ship. She stopped the car shortly after turning, and she parked it carefully in brush so that it couldn't be seen from the road. Then she pulled the garment from the car, and found the bubble air lock rolled up inside it. The Groth worked hard to reach out with her mind to find the oxygen, and twice while it searched, it almost lost contact with the female. Each time the primal fears rose in her; each time there was a battle again for control. The Groth knew that it was weakening rapidly. It had to finish soon, or it would lose after all. If only the pounding from the building would cease, and it didn't refer then to the physical search that was continuing. Robert was beating it down, and it would do nothing about the male adult. It had touched him once only, and it had found an infirmity that could bring about death almost instantly if the provocation were great enough. Probing by the Groth would be great enough. It located oxygen tanks finally, and again Mandy was moving with purpose. She stole a tank from a cabin, walking within feet of the slumbering occupants and out again, back to the lake. The Groth understood the principle of the tanks, but it had not used anything like them, and it was a matter of trial and error until the tank was strapped to Mandy's back. She had donned the garment without hesitation when directed to do so, and now with the tank in place, she was ready. That the suit was two feet too long for her didn't matter; she would have no real swimming to do. And her fingers could work, even though most of the digit holes had been left empty. She walked out awkwardly into the water, breathing uncertainly through the mouthpiece, but showing no fear of submerging. The Groth felt very proud of her, and she seemed to

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be aware of its pleasure. It felt that there was less resistance to it. But there was none of the real joy lifemates knew when they were working in harmony.

The Earthmen in the building housing the vlen had a digging machine at work. The Groth had to explore it, to assess its threat. They were going through the earth cellar, would strike the compressed soil that surrounded the vlen within an hour. It would stop them, of course, but if they decided to blast it with explosives, then they would know that it wasn't merely rock they were hitting. . . . But all that would take time, and perhaps by the time they got that far, it would be far out in space . . .

Mandy sank to the bottom of the lake, fighting for air, thrashing her arms and legs in a futile attempt to swim. She was being held down by winding material that covered her completely, and stank, and there was no air. She clutched at the material over her face and tried to rip it away. Her lungs were bursting, and a curious lightheadedness overcame her. Her thrashing motions were weaker. The pain in her lungs and fear were all she knew, and abruptly it was back with her.

Help me, she begged it. Help me. Please.

There was no fight this time. It directed her hands to the air hose and got it in place. She choked on the first breath of air, and it soothed her and quieted her so that she could breathe normally. It wondered at the tears from its own eyes. It couldn't leave her again. If she did that inside the ship, she would die almost instantly, and her death would be ugly. It fastened all its resources on her then, and she got the air lock in place and went inside it. She turned on the tiny pump, and when the water was exhausted, she opened the door to the ship and entered that. The Groth saw it with its own eyes, and with hers, and it was shocked by the difference. She thought it was hideous, all dark and fungi-like with strange shapes that faded from sight in shadows. It took her to the controls and checked them out. . . . Why didn't someone do something to quiet that male, her lifemate? It tried to close him out, but the lifemate was getting stronger, harder to keep away. She felt his call too, and symbols unfamiliar to the Groth rose and had to be quieted again. It made her work fast, but her hands were clumsy in the suit that was not designed for creatures with only five short fingers. It wondered how they had come down from the trees with such hands. The Groth thought gloomily that it might have to abandon the ship, the vlen, the data bank in orbit, everything.

Then the ship stirred slowly away from the muck at the bottom of the lake. The Groth

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searched through her for observers and found the area clear, and only then pushed the control that took the ship aloft. The ship went straight up as her hands waited for it to do something else with them. The Groth realized how much flying depended on conditioned reflex, how little on conscious control. It had to think hard to keep her eyes turned in the right direction so that it could see the controls. It felt so different now to do with its mind what its fingers had done without its conscious attention. It leveled off much too high, and there was not complete contact.

Mandy stared in horror at the controls before her eyes. She knew that she mustn't let go of the air hose again, and she clamped her teeth hard on the mouth piece when she felt a scream welling up. Not now. Where was the creature? Where was she? She didn't dare move her hands. Somehow she found it, or it found her, and despite all her terror at finding herself alone in the ship, she found herself fighting it again, trying to push it away, shrinking from the repulsive, creeping, burning probe that curled through her brain.

The Groth knew it was being too harsh with her this time. It felt it in the slump of her body that would have fallen to the floor of the ship without its support. It had entered her again without the gentle, subtle approach, thinking that by now she should be accustomed to it. She wasn't. Never would be, it appeared. Her body responded to its commands, but there was no time now to be easy on her. The ship was turned and homed in on the vlen and the tunnel entrance. It hovered over the area and descended softly to the clearing near the boulder that concealed the entrance. The female turned the ship in the right direction and turned on the energy beam that made moving the boulder a matter of directing it only. The energy flowed into the tunnel, and at the far end of it, the Groth started the computer on its way out. The beam carried it along effortlessly, drew it up into the ship. One by one the Groth's furnishings were drawn aboard, and suddenly the female broke loose. She was standing on the ground, close to the ship.

"Robert!" she screamed. She looked about her at the strange ship, and felt the burn of the acidic air, and opened her mouth to scream again. The Groth touched her, and when she fell, it moved her carefully to where she would be able to breathe her own air. It made certain that she was alive, but it was hard to be certain that she would stay alive. It hurried and finished cleaning out the vlen. The male lifemate was leaving the building. The Groth followed him with part of its mind, and it brought the walls of the vlen

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inward with the remaining instruments it had with it. It backed out of the tunnel, collapsing the walls as it went. Outside, it replaced the boulder. It stopped and looked down at the female lying on the ground, and very carefully it probed her again. She moaned. The Groth examined the extent of the acid burns she had suffered, and found that they were negligible; she was in shock now. Using great care it had her remove the suit she wore. Then it soothed her mind, giving her the image of the Gron sea with cool, dim lights playing on the surface, and gentle swells lulling one into deep, healing sleep. It gave her the feeling of love and peace that went with the image. Her breathing became less labored, and her heart became regular and stronger. It could do no more for her. The lifemate was coming toward them fast now, homing in on her with a steadfastness that was unbelievable in one so lacking in training. The Groth climbed inside the ship and took a deep breath of fresh air there. It left the spot before Robert arrived, climbing straight up and away from Earth, a dark shadow without sound. It was so tired that it didn't know if it would recover from this ordeal or not. But that was a small matter. The mission would be successful. The Groth would be able to study the Earthmen and when time for contact came, it would be made with a minimum of strain, and a maximum of good will. That was the important thing.

Mandy woke up screaming, and continued to scream until there was a jab of a needle in her arm. When she woke again, Robert was beside her, but the room was painfully bright. She shut her eyes hard, almost remembering . . . something. It was gone. She was in a hospital room; she knew the smell of it, the texture of the sheets on the bed, the distant sounds that went with a hospital.

"You're all right, Mandy," Robert said. There was an anxious tone in his voice that said he wasn't certain that she was though. She opened her eyes again and the strangeness gave way slowly to familiarity. Robert was grey with black circles under his eyes.

"Did you see . . . anything?" she asked. Her mouth and throat hurt.

"There wasn't anything there to see. You have to believe that, Mandy. You have to. We tore the basement apart, searched every inch of the woods, called in experts. Nothing was there!"

"Tippy? Eric?"

"They're fine. Mandy, they won't let me stay long with you. Please try to understand that nothing was there. Eric must have fallen and hit his head. Tippy panicked when she saw him on the floor. She fainted. We ques-

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tioned them a dozen times and neither of them knows anything at all. After we finished with the basement, even Eric had to admit that nothing could have been down there. Mandy, look at me. You do believe me, don't you?"

She closed her eyes slowly, this time in weariness. There was something just on the edge of awareness, if only she could turn quickly enough she would be able to see it. "Why did you go into the woods? You found me, didn't you?"

"I don't know. I must have heard you scream. I can't remember now, but it must have been a noise you made."

In quick succession she caught snatches of scenes: a lake, black with night, going into it; a ship of some sort; a strange creature that was hurt and lonely and terrifying and repellent. And lovely. She tried to hold onto one of the images, but couldn't. She couldn't connect them with anything.

"How did you get burned, Mandy? Do you remember?" Robert asked.

She shook her head, not opening her eyes. But it was there, too, fading away out of reach. If only he could see with her, help her understand. What little she did retain he would reject. There was no proof, no way to demonstrate it, to weigh it, measure it, compare it to other experiences. Her thoughts were becoming distorted as she drifted back toward sleep and she cried out. Robert squeezed her hand, and she never had felt so alone in her life. Where she was hurt and afraid, he couldn't reach. Then there was something else there, an image of a cool, dimly lighted sea where young played and gentle swells lulled one to deep, peaceful sleep, and where one had love and peace, and was never alone. She smiled and fell asleep again. After a moment Robert released her hand.

"There wasn't anything there," he said under his breath, looking down at her. "We would have found a trace of something." But where had she been? What had happened to her? What was causing her to smile so tenderly in her sleep now? Dully he left the room. They would call him when she woke up again. He walked silently down the empty hospital corridor to the room they had given him for the night, and he knew that the walls and doors didn't matter at all. He was no more separated from her by them than he was when he stood at her side and held her hand and failed to share what she felt, what she thought, what memories caused her first to cry out in terror, then to smile in her sleep. No matter how close they were, they were so far apart, so alone. Always so alone. ◄

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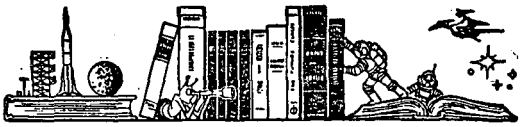
BOOKS



YOU PROBABLY CAN'T BUY A copy. I found it in a stack of remainders at one of the Marboro Bookstores in New York, and maybe they still have some. Your public library *ought* to have it.

It was published in 1965, and I remember thinking, when I read the lukewarm reviews, that it was a book I ought to have a look at. But no one else I've shown it to seems even to have seen any reviews, so I suspect the ones I saw were in England.

All of which is sad indeed, because Hortense Calisher's JOURNAL FROM ELLIPSIA (Little Brown) was undoubtedly the best science fiction novel of 1965, and a strong contender for that matter against some of the first-rate books that have appeared since (FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON, THE CRYSTAL WORLD, GILES GOAT-BOY, THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION, for instance), whether you judge by literary virtue or solid science fiction content.

This is the story of a visitor to Earth from Ellipsia (where ellipsoid creatures inhabit an ellipsoid planet in perfect equilibrium and timeless stability—where there are no pronouns but We and Ours—where One and One always make One). Eli—the name the One adopts on Earth—has come to Earth as part of an intergalactic conspiracy of exchange-visits, and the story is primarily concerned with (his?) education by and of an Earthwoman preparing to go to Ellipsia. (He?), like a few other misfits from elliptical society, is endlessly fascinated by the variety, variability, mutability, of earth's biology and culture, and by the phenomenon of sequential time: just as Janice, (his?) opposite number, is lured by Oneness and simultaneity, serenity, smoothness.

The story is told in alternate sections from the viewpoint of Janice's former lover, Jack Linhouse, a British-American academic, and as the direct narrative of Eli, delivered at Janice's "memorial" service.

It is funny, serious, suspenseful, poignant, philosophical, and *lots* more: it even builds to a climax, and then sustains it. (I mean, something *happens* at the end.)

Ask your library. Or maybe some bright paperback publisher will do something about it.

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On, on, on, and on, *on*; and on, and on, on. The paradox about distance is that quite as much philosophy adheres to a short piece of it as to a long. A being capable of setting theoretical limits to its universe has already been caught in the act of extending it. The merest cherub in the streets here, provided he has a thumbnail—and he usually has ten—does this every day. He may grow up to be one of their fuzzicists, able to conceive that space is curved, but essentially—that is, *elliptically*—he does nothing about it. He lives on, in his rare, rectilinear world of north-south gardens, east-west religions, up-and-down monuments and explosions, plus a blindly variable sort of shifting about which he claims to have perfected through his centuries, thinks very highly of, and is rather pretty in its way and even its name: *free wall*—a kind of generalized travel-bureaudom of "across." It follows that most of his troubles are those of a partially yet imperfectly curved being who is still trying to keep to the straight-and-narrow—and most of his fantasies also. His highest aspiration is, quite naturally, "to get a-Round"; his newest, to get Out.

—JOURNAL FROM ELLIPSIA

Meantime, Inside S-f, the Big Waking-Up Day seems to be arriving: that is, the science-fiction infield has begun to discover that something stranger than rockets is going on—that there's a revolution going on Out There.

Of course as soon as I say that, I have to rush to modify it in two different ways. Phil Dick has known about it all along; so have Phil Farmer, Fritz Leiber, Ted Sturgeon, and a few others. But with the exception of such peripheral writers as Kit Reed, Carol Emshwiller, David Bunch, etc.—who have worked the vein mostly in short stories—American genre writers have kept whatever thoughts they were having on the Revolutions (Youth, Sexual, Black, Psychedelic, et al.) pretty much to themselves—even to the extent of being noisily impressed by the "inventiveness" of Phil Dick's novels.

The second modification suggests some possible reasons for the first, and perhaps accounts for the scant use such otherwise with-it young writers as Disch, Zelazny, and Delany have made of The Scene: the publishers have clearly been convinced that Hip is Hip and Stef is Stef, and never the twain. But the category gap is closing: one of the four crossover novels on hand today was published by Pyramid as part of their regular s-f line. Berkley has made at least a half-way move with an (hot, boy! translated from the *French*) item called SEXUALIS '95, about "a world totally engaged in the pleasures of eroticism"; and even DANGEROUS VISIONS, which I re-

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It was one of the big brutes, a Mark J. Surgeon. Suspended over the flat bed was a glittering tangle of probes and pincers and scalpels, springs, clamps and needles. . . . A Table such as this could lengthen bone and change dental patterns. It could broaden shoulders, put on or take off weight. It could alter germ plasm or blood groupings. . . . It was as precise and unemotional as a vending slot.

Logan didn't want to get on the Table. It could carve and change him, make him into another man. Holly 13 fastened down his ankles and wrists, then attached the sensers. . . . "I like dark hair," said Holly, leaning close to him. The blue spark danced in the depths of her eyes. "Have him give you dark hair."

—LOGAN'S RUN

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viewed here before seeing a copy of the finished book, has come out with a near-illegible "psychedelic" lettered jacket. And there are rumors all around of more to come. Meanwhile—

The main features for today represent a complete range from commercial category s-f, to a privately published mimeographed novel out of San Francisco.

In the middle are Grove's latest William Burroughs book, THE SOFT MACHINE ($5.00), and Dial's LOGAN'S RUN ($3.50), by William F. Nolan and George Clayton Johnson. LOGAN'S RUN is going to surprise a lot of people: although it carries no special label to that effect, the whole book (size, jacket-art, paper, type-face) has the somehow-look of that special sub-sub-category, the Teenage Science Fiction Novel. And indeed it is just that, in all respects but one: it is set in the not-too-far-future, with a cast entirely composed of teenagers, a Secret Agent hero, lots of fast action/adventure/chase stuff, and some solid gobs of what seems to be reliable science talk. The difference is just that in this one (from the flap copy), "Multi-level chrome and glass cities provide their residents with neighborhood LSD parlors. Sex is unlimited and marriage is nonexistent. . . . No one is allowed to live past the age of 21."

Interestingly enough, LOGAN'S RUN and THE SOFT MACHINE make use of almost identical elements—gimmicks, images, thematic content—to achieve radically different effects. In both books, you will find every variety of colorful-familiar s-f menace being manipulated in complex spy-intrigue conspiracy situations; both are concerned with an essentially *irresponsible,* machine-governed society; sex, drugs, death, violence are the main preoccupations of the characters in both books, and the

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So he imports this special breed of scorpions and feeds them on metal meal and the scorpions turned a phosphorescent blue color and sort of hummed. "Now we must find a worthy vessel," he said—So we flush out this old goof ball artist and put the scorpion to him and he turned sort of blue and you could see he was fixed right to the metal—These scorpions could travel on a radar beam and service the clients after Doc copped for the bread—It was a good thing while it lasted and the heat couldn't touch us—However all these scorpion junkies began to glow in the dark and if they didn't score on the hour metamorphosed into scorpions straight away—So there was a spot of bother and we had to move on disguised as young junkies on the way to Lexington—

The war between the sexes split the planet into armed camps right down the middle line divides one thing from the other—And I have seen them all: the Lesbian colonels in tight green uniforms, the young aides and directives regarding the Sex Enemy from proliferating departments.

On the line is the Baby and Semen Market where the sexes meet to exchange the basic commodity which is known as "property"—Unborn properties are shown with a time projector . . . Biological parents in most cases are not owners of the property . . .

—THE SOFT MACHINE

---

central character of both is in flight from the law most of the time, covering incredible areas of space in, effectively, non-time.

Yet where LOGAN contrives to present all this hash seriously, and even compellingly (for the duration of the reading), piling the incredible on the grotesque so swiftly and smoothly that the ugliness goes almost unnoticed, and only the immediate danger facing the hero is significant on any page—it is a totally forgettable book the next morning. Burroughs on the other hand disports his BEMS and metal monsters with a sort of terrible gayety, clearly conscious of their character as clichés, and handling them lightly to achieve maximum impact from their familiarity; indeed, he turns his own most original and terrifying images into clichés-of-a-sort in the course of the book, by repeating scenes and fragments of scenes, sentences and fragments of sentences, in changing juxtapositions, continually. It is not a single-sitting book; I tended to read only short pieces at any one time, and even then, to jump around in the book. But behind the perfervid activity there is meaning, and the images do not fade easily.

Chester Anderson's THE BUTTERFLY KID (Pyramid, 60¢) and

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There are problems associated with marching an orchestra in full throat through lower Manhattan after midnight that the average man can't possibly imagine, and I envy him. The police were no problem—not after the leader produced, on irate demand, an appallingly official city permit to hold a parade through those streets at that hour playing music—but the people who lived in the buildings we passed were difficult to cope with. They threw some of the strangest things, and I couldn't see just how they *were* being coped with. I was starting to develop some faith in the Reality Pill, though. It seemed to give good service.

Mike's acquaintances continued to worry me. "Michael," I inquired as we columned right onto Broadway, "your—friends—look very interesting." . . . "Ah, what are they?"

"Gods, of course. A whole pantheon. It's a *little* pantheon, I'll grant you, but it has a certain fey charm of its own."

—THE BUTTERFLY KID

Willard Bain's INFORMED SOURCES (DAY EAST RECEIVED), again, have a number of vital elements in common, but the contrast between the two books is even sharper. Both deal with a takeover-plot using psychedelic drugs; both make extensive use of the author's own familiarity with "underground" and Hippy circles. But—

BUTTERFLY is clever, glib, sometimes funny. A pop Group foils the Invading Blue Lobsters, and prevents them from loading New York's water supply with the dread Reality Pills (producers of "public hallucinations"—whatever your subconscious wants it will objectify, whether it's butterflies, a halo, an orchestra, or a personal bodyguard of gods and goddesses). The setting is Greenwich Village, twenty years from now—and mostly the West Village at that, which every reader of the *New York Times Magazine* knows by now is strictly tourist country, Teenybopper Land; and the book *reads* like a tourist job, a fast and facile 10-day-wonder, ground out fast when the author realized that if The Scene was acceptable to *Times* readers, it might be all right for science fiction too.

This impression is confirmed, by the way, by the photograph and bio lines on the back cover, which show a vastly bearded and mirror-shaded young man, stove pipes (*a la* pad) in the background, (pot?) pipe in hand, with the information that he "writes for most Underground newspapers, has made an Underground film, runs a singing group, and commutes between the Haight-Ashbury section of San Francisco and Middle Earth."

Like, *too* much!

The physical appearance, make-up, construction, and structure, of

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IS4CX (AMS IN) BULLETIN
CHICAGO, NOW (IS)—INFORMED SOURCES ANNOUNCED TODAY "PERFECTLY HEALTHY" SUSPICIONS THAT ROBIN THE COCK, FAMED CAPTAIN OF THE SO-CALLED PERIPHERAL UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT (CAPS P,U,M) IS DEAD. JC1143ACS

IA APC GREEN DREAMS SOONEST FK DP742PAS

CX YR COCK DEATH IS4CX, KNOW WHO KILT'M PLS?
NY (GENERAL DESK) PR1137PES

LA GREEN DREAMS DETAINED SK. ASSUME YULE HANDLE
FK DP610PAS

IS11SA URGENT
SAN ANTONIO, NOW (IS)—A COMMUNIST BEATNIK DOPE FIEND KILLED AND MUTILATED A 12-YEAR-OLD BOY TODAY AS THE LADBUST THIS
BUST THIS

IS11SK BULLETIN
BERKELEY, NOW (IS)—A PLAN TO BLOW UP GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE IN HONOR OF ROBIN THE COCK, WHOSE ALLEGED LIFE REPORTEDLY HAS ENDED IN RUMORED DEATH, WAS ABANDONED TODAY.
VC807PPS

CX YR IS10CX UNANSWERS OUR 1137PES. NEED SUSPECT. MEMBER PRESSING. NY (GENERAL DESK) PR1105PES

IS12 THE NATION'S WEATHER BY INFORMED SOURCES
UNUSUAL HIGHS AND LOWS WERE REPORTED OVER THE WEEKEND. TEMPERATURES SOARED TO FEVERISH LEVELS IN SOME AREAS WHILE READINGS DIPPED TO RECORD DEPTHS IN OTHERS. SEVERAL THREATENING SQUALLS HAVE BEGUN TO DISSIPATE, BUT A HIGH PRESSURE FRONT IS MOVING ACROSS THE SCENE. THERE HAVE BEEN OCCASIONAL DISTURBANCES NOTED AND SMALL CRAFT WARNINGS HAVE BEEN HOISTED IN SOME REMOTE SECTIONS. IT WILL BE COOL WITH A CHANCE OF SCATTERED CHAOS. PR1101PES

—INFORMED SOURCES (DAY EAST RECEIVED)

INFORMED SOURCES (DAY EAST RECEIVED) put me off just as much as the back cover of BUTTERFLY: it is as self-consciously non-commercial-underground as the other book is over-commercial-hip.

IS is gimmicky, written in newswire cablese, with what few explanations and explications are offered filtered into the text so slowly that most of the opening is sheer bewilderment. It is published under the coy colophon of "The Communication Company"—if indeed "published" is an appropriate word to describe a mimeo job presumably done on a basement machine under dim light; sloppiness

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of reproduction is altogether unforgiveable in a book which relies on typographical effects and makes use of unfamiliar language and abbreviations to the extent this one does.

And besides, it is angry-autobiographical, and at this point I think the News Biz is probably as over-exposed as Mad Ave. All in all, I approached it with considerable resistance, and did not really expect to get through the first 30 pages. Certainly I did not expect to stay up reading till 2 am, once I got through that first 30.

What it's got going for it, I think, is that the self-conscious Hashbury air is in this case absolutely genuine—and the author *is* a well-informed source, not only about wire services (he worked for three years in the San Francisco AP office), but also about the P(eripheral) U(nderground) M(ovement) which provides the background for the Great Green Dreams Conspiracy.

"Day East Received" (I found out somewhere inside the book) is the label under which the San Francisco office of the AP files each 24 hours of teletype messages from the East Coast. This book gives 24 hours worth of wire messages on the (presumptive) death of a legendary character named Robin the Cock. Conflicting "eyewitness" stories, elaborations, interpretations, opinion roundups, interviews, and you-name-it, flood the wires between New York, San Francisco, Dayton, Portland, Honolulu, Dubuque, Milwaukee, Miami, Boston, Baltimore, and points elsewhere. Between Flashes and Bulletins, the IS (Informed Sources) attempts to conduct the routine business of its distinctive service: including the over-tricky bit of reviews of the novel itself, and some hilarious send-ups on standard news services (the weather report, the Top Tunes listing, etc.). Through all this, a conspiracy is being conducted, almost-but-not-quite off-wire by members of the P.U.M., and—

And that's enough. I won't give it *all* away.

Everyone with sentimental attachment to the mimeographed publication—whether fanzine or underground or just old-hat *avant-garde*—will probably want a copy of this; anyone else who takes the trouble to order a copy will probably be at least amused. I was that, and much more. (Copies from the author, 3 Taylor Lane, Corte Madera, Calif., 94925; $3.00)

—JUDITH MERRIL

READER REACTION: In hopes of encouraging a public exchange of ideas on the science fiction and fantasy field, we plan to experiment with a Letters to the Book Editor Column. This column will be open to: 1)

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reactions to the reviews and general observations of the Book column, and 2) comments on books that may not have been mentioned in the usual space allotted for "Books." Comments should be limited to 250 words. There are no other restrictions. The column will be open to all: interested readers and professionals alike. A certain amount of aggressive advocacy or dissent is encouraged, so long as it is based on honest ideas or judgments and that "plugs" or abuse of a personal nature are omitted. Address comments to: Letters, Fantasy and Science Fiction, 347 East 53 St., New York, N. Y. 10022.

BOOKS RECEIVED

FICTION

THE RULE OF THE DOOR AND OTHER FANCIFUL REGULATIONS, Lloyd Biggle, Jr., Doubleday 1967, 206 pp., $3.95

A TORRENT OF FACES, James Blish and Norman L. Knight, Doubleday 1967, 270 pp., $4.95

QUICKSAND, John Brunner, Doubleday 1967, 240 pp., $4.50

TOO MANY MAGICIANS, Randall Garrett, Doubleday 1967, 260 pp., $4.95

SF: THE BEST OF THE BEST, Judith Merril, ed., Delacorte 1967, 438 pp., $6.50

STRANGE GATEWAYS, E. Hoffmann Price, Arkham House 1967, 208 pp., $4.00

GENERAL

THE SEARCH FOR THE ROBOTS, Alfred J. Cote, Jr., Basic Books 1967, 243 pp., $5.95

SCIENCE IN UTOPIA, Nell Eurich, Harvard University Press 1967, 332 pp., $7.95

JAMES BRANCH CABELL, THE DREAM AND THE REALITY, Desmond Tarrant, University of Oklahoma Press 1967, 292 pp., $5.95

PAPERBACKS

THE BUTTERFLY KID, Chester Anderson, Pyramid 1967, 60¢

WHAT WE REALLY KNOW ABOUT FLYING SAUCERS, Otto Binder, Fawcett Gold Medal 1967, 75¢

ALL FOOLS DAY, Edmund Cooper, Berkley 1967, 60¢

GARBAGE WORLD, Charles Platt, Berkley 1967, 60¢

LOST IN SPACE, Dave Van Arnam and Ron Archer, Pyramid 1967, 60¢

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"Better give the missus a touch, too."

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Chet Arthur writes: "Born 33 years ago in New Orleans. Unmarried. Have lived as professional student, history teacher (Tulane, LSU), a variety of casual jobs. In 1965 wrote a novel which Doubleday published, some praised, few bought. I like shishkebab, light ale, Zen, Bach, the Beatles; dislike the literature of personal anguish and social significance. A peripheral sort of cat, I guess. But fascinated by a world where revolution is the norm, violence a domestic pet, the miraculous a bit of a bore." Violence a domestic pet—a good phrase and a key one for this story, which comes on like a kitten and leaves you with your eyes scratched out.

THE LUCKY PEOPLE

by Chet Arthur

THEIR CHAIRS STOOD IN A rough crescent, backs to a TV set.

"You're so lucky," said the Rangles. "So lucky to live *here.*"

Mr. Stedman allowed himself a glance around his blank beige living room before saying comfortably, "We like it."

He had just brought in the drinks and the two couples clinked their ice and swished their respective bourbons and gins.

"I suppose," said Alice Rangle, her eyes on her drink, "that, well—there's *absolutely* no danger of them getting in?"

The Stedmans chuckled, and Alice made a apologetic moue.

"Not a chance—tenderfoot," said Mr. Stedman.

"And," said Fred Rangle, in his habitually diffident tone, "and, ah, this boy; little fellow who discovered all this. I suppose we'll be seeing *him* later on?"

"Soon as the show starts," said Mr. Stedman decisively, "you'll see Tiger. Jamie that is. We gotta rule here. *Homework comes first.* That's the way we do things."

"You're so right," murmured Alice, sipping. "You should see the trouble we have with Judy. And *her* only distraction is TV."

"Kids," said Mr. Stedman, and they all drank.

"How long do we have to wait?" asked Fred suddenly. And blushed: he was afraid the Stedmans would take it as meaning he didn't enjoy their conversation. But Mr. Stedman only smiled at his impatience.

In fact he liked entertaining tenderfeet. He liked inviting them home (with some casual remark

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like. "We live in a curfew neighborhood, of course, so come early"). Above all he liked the contrast between their edginess, their need to be reassured, and his own white-hunter cool.

Old timers, on the other hand, tended to act just too damn blasé. They made remarks like: "I've seen 'em two and three times this size," or: "It's a fun show, but when you get right down to it, the action's too irregular," or even: "I hear they caught a tramp over on Melody Drive. In prime time, too"—a remark all the more insufferable because it was true. No: Mr. Stedman would take a tenderfoot anytime.

He said simply, "Don't worry about it, Fred. We've still got time to chat before the lights come on."

They talked business, children, the men exchanged recipes, and all admitted that they still had not read *The Magus* but meant to. Then Dora Stedman, artificially casual, glanced at the sunburst clock on the wall and said, "I think it's about time to start now, dear."

With an alacrity he could never quite conceal, Charles Stedman went to the end of the beige drapery and pulled a cord. With a creak of pulleys and a little discharge of dust the drapes parted to show a dusky suburban street. The houses alternated, raised and ranch style. Across the way other drapes were being drawn from a second floor picture window over a built-in garage. For an instant they glimpsed a warm rose interior, as if the door of a stove had been opened, and then the inner lights went out. A martianesque aluminum pole at the street's edge was coming to life, however; a flutter in the beveled globe suddenly brightened, the street palpitated, and then the dusk vanished in a brilliant blue, absolutely uniform cadaver-light. A row of ordinary green shrubs became a stage setting, lacquered and unreal.

"And at this very window . . ." Alice Rangle's voice was subdued.

"Actually, yes."

"The discovery was made. Dora, you should put up a plaque!"

"Maybe we *will*."

Dora had provided crackers and a bowl of dip. The lights had hardly been turned out when Jamie appeared, muttered a formal greeting, and sank to the floor on folded legs, his hand vanishing automatically into the cracker bowl. The Rangles, mindful of discipline, tried not to stare at the shadowy small discoverer. And between watching the street and sneaking looks at Jamie and the near-darkness and all, it was no wonder they fumbled their crackers and dripped their dip and munched and sipped clumsily, like distracted ruminants.

"Oh, *look*. There's one now."

"Oh. Ohh."

"Just a little baby. Bout four feet long I'd say."

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"Over a yard, anyway." Fred, trying to be cool.

The window was much like a huge TV screen. The lacquered greens were somewhat richer than the watchers were accustomed to, and there was a complete absence of hysterical orange, queasy chartreuse, and seeping red. Basically, however, it was all quite familiar, including the figures moving about. Only so *big*.

"I feel like I've shrunk," said Alice suddenly, and in the darkness the Stedmans nodded understandingly.

"Like the Incredible Shrinking Man or something."

"Guess these things don't," said Fred suddenly, and cleared his throat, "ah—*catch* too many people any more?"

"Not since the curfew was imposed," said Charles unwillingly. And still more unwillingly, "But they did catch a tramp just recently on Melody Drive. In prime time, too."

"Snoring with his wine all day, probably, and slept through curfew," Alice said reprovingly.

"That's what we think."

"Well, it was too bad."

"Sure was. We looked at a house on Melody Drive before we settled on this one."

Outside, the gigantic frail forms moved about under the lights, their wings dim opalescent blurs. A large-eyed face with a yard-long proboscis appeared suddenly before the glass, making Alice flinch. When one passed in front of the streetlight, a dark coil of innards could be discerned through the translucent abdomen.

"And to think," said Fred softly, "that it's all live programming."

Charles had gone to freshen the drinks when Fred asked, "Has anybody really explained it?"

"Maybe Atomic Radiation?" asked Alice, doubtfully.

"I don't see how it could be, since the Test Ban," said Dora Stedman. Obviously she had given the matter a good deal of thought. "No, in my opinion it was Insecticides. You know, it's all swamp out beyond this subdivision and we'd had a pilot spraying it for a year or two before this happened." She chuckled softly, an engaging little chuckle. "You should hear the arguments Charles and I have about it! Gracious. Finally it winds up with both of us tight and Charles muttering, 'We just don't *know* . . . we just don't *know*.' For some reason, when you're tight that line seems very meaningful, like something Mr. Spock might say when the *Enterprise* is in danger. Oh, thank you, dear."

Passing the drinks, Charles said, "Dora telling you her little *theory*? Now for me, I say we just don't *know*. Cheers."

"Tell us how you discovered them," said Alice. "Tell us about the First Night."

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"That *wonderful* first night," Dora repeated dreamily.

"We were waiting for *Bonanza,*" said Charles solemnly.

"And watching the news."

"And Tiger hates news, and he was just mooning around."

"Had his homework all done, or didn't he have any?"

"I didn't have any," said Jamie. "And I looked out this window."

"He was *really* at loose ends," said Charles apologetically.

"And there they were!"

"And we kept saying, 'Jamie, *Bonanza* is coming on!' And he kept yelling back—"

"They got a better show on this channel," shouted Jamie, and burst into engaging boyish laughter.

"It was really too gruesome," said Dora and everybody instantly sobered. "We didn't see this, thank Heaven, but they got poor Mrs. Ladle down the street when she went out to turn off her lawn sprinkler. But she had always been unlucky that way. Why, last time the swamp flooded an alligator came up through the storm drains and ate her Prettypuss. Do you remember that, dear?"

Charles grunted. "Don't forget the Bunches," he said gloomily. "They had just joined the Club."

"That was *their* house," said Jamie, pointing at the one across the street. "Now some people with a kid named Clarence live there. He stinks."

"Smells," said Dora automatically. "Actually, we saw it get in. A big one. Followed his car into the garage. I was making popcorn, and Charles called me back into the living room. 'One's followed Hyman Bunch's car into the garage,' he said.

" 'I don't think Jamie ought to be watching this,' I said.

" 'Aw, come on, Mom,' said Jamie, but just as I was about to put my foot down, the front door opened across the street, and out ran the Bunches."

"Out ran the Bunches," said Charles heavily. "I was thinking about opening the door for them, but it never came to that. I'd say it took half a minute, a minute."

"And then there were the police."

Quickly Jamie tied himself into a knot. "Wow, the police," he said. "Was that ever wild."

"Sit straight," said Dora, "or you'll have to go to your room."

"Let Tiger tell it," said Charles. "Then he's got to go to bed. You're on, Tiger."

Tiger was suddenly tongue tied. After gargling for a few moments he finally said, "This big cop car —"

"Police car—"

"Police car comes screeching up, eeeeeek, and swings around three or four times with its tires peeling off, and—"

"Don't jazz it up, son. Stick to the facts."

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"Yeah. And five, six cops jump out! Throwing tear gas grenades! Man, it was like a riot. Started shooting riot guns and knocked down a dozen or so, I guess. Kinda stupid, getting out of the car, but it was the first show of the season and I guess they didn't know no better. I guess. Anyway, they got in behind 'em and speared 'em a coupla times, and cops started running ever which ways, stamping all over Daddy's camellias, and you should of heard him yell! Then one of the cops jumped in the car and bugged out on the others! Man, they ought to've shot that guy. And the cops that were left behind they run this way and that way, and one of 'em run up to this window and he had thrown away his shotgun which was lucky, and he pounded on the glass and with his gas mask on did he look weird! And then he pulled off his mask and a big one was coming up behind him and he dodged off to the side.

"And that was when the doorbell rang," he added as an afterthought.

"Time for bed now, Tiger."

"Okay. And the bell rang and rang."

"That's enough, Tiger."

"Okay, Daddy. And the cop yelled, 'For Christ's sake open up!' " He giggled.

"Jamie, do *not* use the Lord's name."

"Okay. G'night, Mom, Daddy. G'night, gladtuvmetcha." From the doorway he yelled, *"And it stopped ringing and that's all about the cops."* He went down the hall whistling.

Fred Rangle found something to say, luckily, and if he said it too abruptly, that was just diffident Fred for you, forcing himself.

"Lucky people," he said with entirely uncharacteristic heartiness. "Lucky people, living here."

"Little envious, huh," said Charles weakly.

"I wish we could get this show where we live," Fred went on. "But I'm afraid we never will."

"Too central," said Alice, doing her part. "The traffic scares 'em."

"Come to think of it," said Fred, making the first joke of his life, "the traffic scares *me*."

They all laughed gratefully at the little jest. Charles was already sounding heartier as he said again, "Little envious, huh!"

"Good God yes," said both the Rangles, rattling their ice. "TV all winter, and all summer, instead of reruns—this!"

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The science of handwriting analysis cannot be said to have the acceptance of, say, the Socratic method; but since there will always be those who refuse to see the wall under the handwriting, it does have a certain loyal following. Here is a perfect and funny illustration: a story about the inspiring Dr. Ferthumlunger, who was no Socrates, and an inspired student who seems doomed to be something of a Platonist, at least in matters of romance.

THE STARS KNOW

by Mose Mallette

Monday August 14

I AM NOT LIKE MOST MEN. Women are a mystery to most men. But women are not a mystery to me. Take Lorna for example. Lorna is the new Coordinator of Creative Ideation. All most men can tell about Lorna is that she is blond, leggy, luscious, and nothing doing. But I know Lorna is in love with me. This morning I got a note from her. It ran:

> You are two days late with the Woodman's Wine campaign. Better watch it, boy!
>
> L. D.

Possibly this note does not sound romantic. However, as a graduate of Dr. Ferthumlunger's 40-week handwriting analysis course, I can tell that it is expressive of the most passionate love. For me, naturally, since the note was sent to me. I reached this conclusion about Lorna's hidden longings by applying Ferthumlunger's Feracious Analysis. This is an inspired technique from beginning to end. First you take the specimen of handwriting and close your eyes. Then you repeat three times the Ferthumlunger Facilitating Formula: "If the stars know, the brain knows; if the brain knows, the hand knows; if the hand knows, it shows." Now you open your eyes and start compiling the Ferthumlunger Fatidic Figuratives. Lorna's note provided 312, all indicative of her passion for me. I call partic-

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ular attention to the sex-latent capitals, the rounded *n*'s and *m*'s, the generous *o*'s and *a*'s, and the unmistakably yearning ascenders in *late*. Ah, poor girl, so hopelessly smitten; I must be gentle with her.

I should mention that, in tallying the Figuratives, it is of the utmost importance not to let the sense of the message distort one's evaluation. A Ferthumlunger adept like myself can analyze pages of text without developing the least notion of what the writer intends; this is as it should be. As Dr. Ferthumlunger always says, there are two meanings to a message, the Lexico-Semantic, the meaning in the ordinary sense, and the Crypto-Configurative, the Real, Hidden Meaning to which Dr. Ferthumlunger's methods give us access. Unfortunately, in analyzing Lorna's message, I let emotion get the better of the Transparentizing Process, and some of the Lexico-Semantic meaning crept in. I had the impression, before I fully Transparentized the message, that something was bothering Lorna. I hope she's not having job trouble.

Tuesday August 15

A second note from Lorna today:

> You've certainly confirmed the bad reports I've had about you—"You don't have to be a woodman to enjoy Woodman's Wine"!!! Come up with something adult or you're out!
>
> L. D.

Everything's still rosy between us—530 favorable Figuratives. Ah, love, love!

I've just been playing around with some variations on my Woodman's Wine slogan. "All woodmen drink Woodman's Wine" might be even better than my inspiration of yesterday. No, come to think of it there probably aren't many woodmen. Restricted market—very bad. What is a woodman anyway? Hewers of wood, drawers of water. Water into wine. "Woodman's Wine is better than water." Would that offend the water manufacturers? Or is water manufactured? Where does water come from? Out of the sky I seem to recall. "As the gentle rain of heaven falls alike on the just and unjust, so gentle Woodman's . . ."? "The gentle wine for gentle woodmen"? Hmm . . . my brain seems to be wandering. Guess I'll call it a day.

Wednesday August 16

A cloud has fallen on my romance. Perhaps it's not serious, but for the first time Lorna has expressed reservations about me:

> My goodness, I owe you an apology. When I put all your submissions on Woodman's Wine together, I saw that they

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comprised a vast joke, really a very clever satire on the usual campaign of this sort. I haven't got the heart to be angry. I looked in on you in your little glass cell yesterday. You were staring sightlessly in front of you, repeating something over and over—I could see your lips moving. I think you must be a secret poet! Won't you have lunch with me today and tell me what you're really up to?

Lorna Ditmars

The spiky *e*'s, the cramped *p*'s, a host of other signs leave no doubt —Lorna is no longer mindlessly devoted to me. Must get Dr. F's opinion too.

Thursday August 17

Just as I feared—worse and worse. Oh, she was cordial enough at lunch yesterday, and we made pleasant conversation. As if that kind of communication could mean anything! Women are ever the serpent, full of guile. But no matter how guileful, she can't disguise the 1042 plain Figuratives in her faithless note of this morning:

Darling—

What a discovery you are! You *are* a poet! I've never heard such detached, ethereal opinions as you voiced yesterday. Never mind about that silly Woodman's Wine campaign. I've given it to that time-server Harkness. Tomorrow you move up here with me and we'll snare the Garmany account together—they won't be able to resist that feverish imagination of yours. (See you at 8 tonight just as we planned.)

Lorna

Hooked *r*'s, slash-crossed *t*'s, and narcissistic *y*'s show where love has gone. Alas.

Friday August 18

Talked to Dr. F. tonight after his lecture, "Does Binding Determine Meaning?—A Study of the Glues in 10,000 Dictionaries." He agrees fully with my interpretation —though of course today's note left little room for doubt:

Dearest—

You're everything I've dreamed of. We must do this on a regular basis.

Your Lorna

Short, but the intent is plain: hatred, rejection, arrogance. I'll give her one more chance.

Monday August 21

Caught Dr. F's big weekend lecture, "The Metalanguage of Glue." Thought it might cheer me up. But no luck—I still feel horribly deceived by that awful woman. This is her latest:

Dearest Darling—

Why have you become cold?

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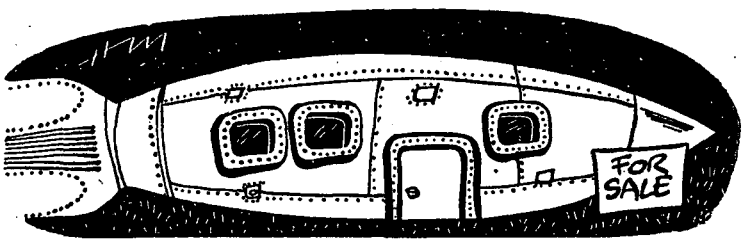
Why are you avoiding me? Don't cast me off without a word. Please, darling, tell me what's wrong.

Still Your Lorna

This is the end. I won't even catalog all the signs of her perfidy. I'll never get over this.

Tuesday August 22

Well, I've gotten over it. Dr. Ferthumlunger re-Transparentized me. I'm working as his assistant now. Dr. F. is going to include my misadventure in his book, *The Inmost Quat.* Sometimes I wonder whether I might have been saved from Lorna's fickleness if I had actually *read* her notes. But this is surely an irrational thought. Must talk to Dr. F. about it.



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APERTURE IN THE SKY

by Ted Thomas

THE ASTRONOMERS CAN IDENTIFY many thousands of radio sources in the sky, and there are many thousands yet to be discovered. Most of the known sources do not coincide with a bright object; the radio telescopes detect something, but the optical telescopes do not. After fifteen years of work with the radio telescopes, it turns out that only a few of the strong radio sources can be pegged to a glowing galaxy or other visible object. But it is not possible to fix astronomical positions with much accuracy when using radio telescopes. Positions are fuzzy, no better than within about 5 to 10 seconds of arc. This isn't good enough. And even this accuracy can be obtained only by using some tricks. Separate aerials hooked to the same receiver produce interference patterns that sometimes allow a fix with an accuracy of 5 seconds of arc. Not good enough.

Some positions can be accurately fixed when the moon eclipses the source. By noting when the source fades as the moon blots it out, and then noting when the source comes on again as the moon passes, you get two possible points for the source's position. Additional observations can help determine which of the two points is the true source point. Knowledge of the moon's exact position then fixes the exact position of the source with an accuracy of about 0.5 seconds. The trouble is that only a few radio sources are eclipsed by the moon.

Now, our ability to place materials in orbit around the Earth grows more refined all the time. Perhaps we should consider spreading a huge blanket made of separate wires or strips in orbit at a proper distance from Earth. The great blanket would have an opening, an aperture, in it through which could pour the radiation from celestial sources. In effect we would have a radio telescope with a barrel thousands of miles long. With it we could position radio sources on the celestial sphere with pinpoint accuracy. It might be useful for pinpointing any intelligent signals coming our way.

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FROM A TERRAN TRAVEL FOLDER

Not many tourists come
here with their ho and hum,
their holier than thou
clickers, their thorny brow
piety. Churches cater,
if at all, to a later
visitation, an off-
season paradise for
indigent Messiahs,
but no facilities
exist to house or feed
a prime spiritual need.
Bodies are the vogue here
but difficult to steer
and stifling to aware-
ness. Luckily they tear
easily and there are
many to choose from. Star
travelers may be shocked
at some customs: minds locked
at all times, self worship
and the disgusting habit
of energy intake,
but for some the sweet ache
of original sin
will counter every dis-
advantage, the guilt studied
at first hand, and the shudder
at seeing the sad grin
stamped on each bag of skin,
token that, with sundry pains,
each bag of skin contains
a skeleton. For offbeat
tastes, a real treat.

—WALTER H. KERR

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William F. Nolan's latest book is the novel LOGAN'S RUN *(see this month's "Books"), which is headed for the screen after a just completed sale to MGM for $100,000. George Pal will produce the motion picture. Nolan has no less than six books scheduled to appear in 1968, including two sf collections. This short and chilling tale is his fifth appearance in F&SF, and Nolan tells us that the locale is quite real—the street on which he lived as a child in Kansas City.*

HE KILT IT WITH A STICK

by William F. Nolan

A SUMMER NIGHT IN KANSAS City.

Ellen away, visiting her parents. The house on Forest empty, waiting.

Warm air.

A high, yellow moon.

Stars.

Crickets thrumming the dark.

Fireflies.

A summer night.

Fred goes to the Apollo on Troost to see a war film. It depresses him. All the killing. He leaves before it has ended, walking up the aisle and out of the deserted lobby and on past the empty glass ticket booth. Alone.

The sidewalk is bare of pedestrians.

It is late, near midnight, and traffic is very sparse along Troost. The wide street is silent. A truck grinds heavily away in the distance.

Fred begins to walk home.

He shouldn't. It is only two blocks: a few steps to the corner of 33rd, then down the long hill to Forest, then left along Forest to his house at the end of the block, near 34th. Not quite two blocks to walk. But too far for him. Too far.

Fred stops.

A gray cat is sleeping in the window of Rae's Drug Store. Fred

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presses the glass. *I could break the window—but that would be useless. The thing would be safe by then; it would leap away and I'd never find it in the store. The police would arrive and— No. Insane. Insane to think of killing it.*

The gray cat, quite suddenly, opens its eyes to stare at Fred Baxter. Unblinking. Evil.

He shudders, moves quickly on.

The cat continues to stare.

Foul thing knows what I'd like to do to it.

The hill, sloping steeply toward Forest, is tinted with cool moonlight. Fred walks down this hill, filled with an angry sense of frustration: he would very much have enjoyed killing the gray cat in the drug store window.

Hard against chest wall, his heart judders. Once, twice, three times. Thud thud thud. He slows, removes a tissue-wrapped capsule from an inside pocket. Swallows the capsule. Continues to walk.

Fred reaches the bottom of the hill, crosses over to Forest.

Trees now. Big fat-trunked oaks and maples, fanning their leaves softly over the concrete sidewalk. Much darker. Thick tree-shadow midnight dark, broken by three street lamps down the long block. Lamps haloed by green night insects.

Deeper.

Into the summer dark. . . .

When Fred Baxter was seven, he wrote: "Today a kitty kat bit me at school and it sure hurt a lot. The kitty was bad, so I kilt it with a stick."

When he was ten, and living in St. Louis, a boy two houses up told Fred his parents wanted to get rid of a litter. "I'll take care of it," Fred assured him—and the next afternoon, in Miller Lake, he drowned all six of the kittens.

At fifteen, in high school, Fred trapped the janitor's Tabby in the gymnasium locker room, choked it to death, and carried it downstairs to the furnace. He was severely scratched in the process.

As a college freshman, in Kansas City, Fred distributed several pieces of poisoned fish over the Rockhurst campus. The grotesquely twisted bodies of seven cats were found the next morning.

Working in the sales department of Hall Brothers, Fred was invited to visit his supervisor at home one Saturday—and was seen in the yard, playing with Frances, a pet Siamese. She was later found crushed to death, and it was assumed a car had run over the animal. Fred quit his job ten days later because his supervisor had cat hands.

Fred married Ellen Ferber when he was thirty, and she wanted to have children right away. Fred said no, that babies were small and furry in their blankets, and disturbed him. Ellen bought herself a small kitten for company while

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Fred was on the road. He didn't object—but a week after the purchase, he took a meat knife and dismembered the kitten, telling Ellen that it had "wandered away." Then he bought her a green parakeet.

ZZZZZZZ *Click*

This is Frederick Baxter speaking and I . . . wait, the sound level is wrong and I'll— There, it's all right now. I can't tell anyone about this—but today I found an old Tom in an alley downtown, and I got hold of the stinking wretched animal, and I . . .

ZZZZZZZ Click

The heart trouble started when Fred was thirty-five.

"You have an unusual condition," the doctor told him. "You are, in effect, a medical oddity. Your chest houses a quivering-muscles heart—a fibrillator. Your condition can easily prove fatal. Preventive measures must be taken. No severe exercise, no overeating, plenty of rest."

Fred obeyed the man's orders—although he did not really trust a doctor whose cat eyes reflected the moon.

ZZZZZZZ *Click*

. . . awful time with the heart. Really awful. The use of digitalis drives me to alcohol, which sends my heart into massive flutters. Then the alcohol forces me into a need for more digitalis. It is a deadly circle and I . . .

I have black dreams. A nap at noon and I dream of smothering. This comes from the heart condition. And because of the cats. They all fear me, now, avoid me on the street. They've *told* one another about me. This is fact. Killing them is becoming quite difficult . . . but I caught a big, evil one in the garden last Thursday and buried it. Alive. As I am buried alive in these black dreams of mine. I got excited, burying the cat—and this is bad for me. I must go on killing them, but I must *not* get excited. I must stay calm and not—here comes Ellen, so I'd better. . . .

ZZZZZZ *Click*

"What's wrong, Fred?"

It was two a.m. and Ellen had awakened to find him standing at the window.

"Something in the yard," he said.

The moon was flushing the grass with pale gold—and a dark shape scuttled over the lawn, breaking the pattern. A cat shape.

"Go to sleep," said his wife, settling into her pillow.

Fred Baxter stared at the cat, who stared back at him from the damp yard; its head raised, the yellow of the night moon now brimming the creature's eyes. The cat's mouth opened.

"It's sucking up the moonlight," Fred whispered.

Then he went back to bed.

But did not sleep.

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Later, thinking about this, Fred recalled what his mother had often said about cats. "They perch on the chest of a baby," she'd said, "place their red mouth over the soft mouth of the baby and draw all the life from its body. I won't have one of the disgusting things in the house."

Alone in the summer night, walking down Forest Avenue in Kansas City, Fred passes a parked car, bulking black and silent in its gravel driveway. The closed car windows gleam deep yellow from the eyes inside.

Eyes?

Fred stops, looks back at the car.

It is packed with cats.

How many? Ten . . . a dozen. More . . . twenty maybe. All inside the car, staring out at me. Dozens of foul, slitted-yellow eyes. . .

Fred can do nothing. He checks all four doors of the silent automobile, finds them locked. The cats stare at him.

Filthy creatures!

He moves on.

The street is oddly silent. Fred realizes why: the crickets have stopped. No breeze stirs the trees; they hang over him, heavy and motionless in the summer dark.

The houses along Forest are shuttered, lightless, closed against the night. Yet, on a porch, Fred detects movement.

Yellow eyes spark from porch blackness. A big dark-furred cat is curled into a wooden swing. It regards Fred Baxter.

Kill it!

He moves with purposeful stealth, leans to grasp a stout tree limb which has fallen into the yard. He mounts the porch steps.

The dark-furred cat has not stirred.

Fred raises the heavy limb. The cat hisses, claws extended, fangs balefully revealed. It cries out like a wounded child and vanishes off the porch into the deep shadow between houses.

Missed. Missed the rotten thing.

Fred moves down the steps, crosses the yard toward the walk. His head is lowered in anger. When he looks up, the walk is thick with cats. He runs into them, kicking, flailing the tree-club. They scatter, melting away from him as butter from a heated blade.

Thud. Thud, thud. Fred drops the club. His heart is rapping, fisting his chest. He leans against a tree, sobbing for breath. The yellow-eyed cats watch him from the street, from bushes, from steps and porches and the tops of cars.

Didn't get a one of them. Not a damn one. . . .

The fireflies have disappeared. The street lamps have dimmed into smoked circles above the heavy, cloaking trees. The clean summer sky is shut away from him—and Fred Baxter finds the air clogged

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with the sharp, suffocating smell of catfur.

He walks on down the block.

The cats follow him.

He thinks of what fire could do to them—long blades of yellow crisping flame to flake them away into dark ash—but he cannot burn them. . . . Burning them would be impossible. There are *hundreds.* That many at least.

They fill driveways, cover porches, blanket yards, pad in lion-like silence along the street. The yellow moon is in their eyes; sucked from the sky. Fred, his terror rising, arches his head to look upward.

The trees are alive with them!

His throat closes. He cannot swallow. Catfur cloaks his mouth. . . .

Fred begins to run down the concrete sidewalk, stumbling, weaving, his chest filled with a terrible winged beating.

A sound.

The scream of the cats.

Fred claps both hands to his head to muffle the stab and thrust of sound.

The house . . . must reach the house.

Fred staggers forward. The cat-masses surge in behind him as he runs up the stone walk to his house.

A cat lands on his neck. Mutely, he flings it loose—plunges up the wooden porch steps.

Key. Find your key and unlock the door. Get inside!

Too late.

Eyes blazing, the cats flow up and over him, a dark furry stifling weight as he pulls back the screen. Claws and needle teeth rip at his back, arms, face, legs . . . shred his clothing and skin. He twists wildly, beating at them. Blood runs into his eyes. . . .

The door is open. He falls forward, through the opening. The cats swarm after him in hot waves, covering his chest, sucking the breath from his body. Baxter's thin scream is lost in the sharp, rising, all-engulfing cry of the cats.

A delivery boy found him two days later, lying face down on the living room floor. His clothes were wrinkled. But untorn.

A cat was licking the cold white unmarked skin of Frederick Baxter's cheek.

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The most recent among Ted White's half-dozen published novels is SECRET OF THE MARAUDER SATELLITE (*"Books" October 1967*). *This is his second story for F&SF, a haunting fantasy about a private detective named Ronald Archer, and what happened to him on a hot summer day when the world stopped and the music began.*

WEDNESDAY, NOON

by Ted White

I WAS SITTING IN MY OFFICE, wondering where the next job was going to come from, when I heard the music outside my door.

It was a hot summer day, the typical New York summer day, with a vaguely hazy overcast that made the sky seem a glowing leaden yellow, and the smell of the river hanging in the air. I had the transom over my door open, in the bare hope that it might set up a cross-draft with my open window. It didn't seem to be working. The black soot that had collected on my window sill hadn't stirred an inch.

At first I put it down as another piece of rock-and-roll music, and tuned it out. Somebody in the hall, or in one of the offices opposite, had a transistor radio going. That happens a lot on my block of Ninth Avenue, in the forties. Mine was just one of a number of cubbyhole offices rented out to song jockies, skin-flick producers, promo men of various persuasions, and men like me.

Me, I'm a private detective.

I enjoy saying that; it has a certain shock effect that I quietly relish. It conjures up all those images of TV private eyes, with their sexy blonde secretaries, a gun in a shoulder holster, and all that. It hasn't much resemblance to reality.

I'm reality. I'm Ronald Archer, Investigations. Mostly I do skip traces, divorce work, and subcon-

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tracting. The only time I take my gun out of my locked desk drawer is when I've subcontracted for a guard detail from one of the big outfits—they get short of men occasionally—and then I strap it on my waist, in plain sight.

I can't afford a secretary, and if I could, she probably would be as out-of-character as I am. I weigh in at 250, when I ease off the beer, and I'm about six and a half tall. I am on the wrong side of forty, and I am not handsome. I look like a big slob, and that's my protective coloration, for what it's worth.

It's not a great life, but it has its illusions. I get to sit around my office, quietly reading the latest *Car Life* or *High Fidelity* magazine, sipping beer from my corner 'fridge, while the rest of the city pounds about its duties in that hot sun. I can knock off when I want to, go up to one of the airconditioned museums or over to Lincoln Center for an afternoon concert, and there's nobody but my bankbook to say no. Freedom—it's what you make of it. This is mine.

But that damned noise out in the hall was getting to me.

I was pretty sure the thing had been on more than three minutes, and it was still going strong. That's pretty unlikely; these days it's a rare pop record that runs over two minutes. They like to get in as many commercials as they can.

A line caught my ear—*"This is an invitation, across the nation—a chance for folks to meet . . ."* The melody, if I can call it that, was hypnotically monotonous, a rhythmic thumping, with a chorus of voices repeating a phrase over and over, while a female voice chanted the curious lyrics.

Intrigued, I tried to catch more of the words.

"All we need is music, sweet music," the voice exhorted, and a passing truck drowned her out. The roar from the street subsided to a rumble, and then I heard,

"Oh, it doesn't matter what you wear,
Just as long as you are there.
So come on, every guy—grab a girl,
Everywhere around the world . . ."

An ambulance screamed past, and then I heard the last notes of the song fading into silence. A typical trick—they can't figure a legitimate way to end these things, so they fade out. But then it started up again—the third time around?

"Calling out around the world—
Are you ready for a brand new beat?
Summer's here, and the time is right
For dancin' in the street . . ."

It didn't make sense. No radio station is going to play a record over and over again, not the same one.

Grunting to myself, I pried loose from my chair and stood up.

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I pushed my chair back, went around my scarred secondhand desk, and opened the door.

Just as I'd thought. The door of the building's local talent agency, so-called, was open just down the hall. They were pretty good about muffling the anguished squawks of their auditioning singers, but they hadn't thought of the gum-chewing girl sitting on their plastic-covered sofa, reading a copy of *Variety*, with a blaring transistor radio sitting in her lap.

She looked up as I blocked the doorway. She was a little prettier than I'd expected. There was some depth to her looks; it hadn't all been covered up by the overdone eye makeup, the pale skin, and the teased-up hair. She looked about eighteen, which meant she was either sixteen or twenty-four. It always figures out that way.

"Yuh hafta have the radio so loud?" I said.

"It's a free country."

"Sure."

"Well, okay, so I wasn't noticing." Her fingers moved surreptitiously for the volume control, while she stared up at me. "You know how it is," she said, as the sound diminished somewhat. "You go inta the subway, or up the elevator, and it blocks out, ya know? What I mean, you haveta turn it up some. So I didn't notice, okay?"

There was no one else in the outer room; we had it to ourselves.

"That's a funny record they're playing," I said. Truce. "They keep playing it, over and over."

"Yeah," she said. "I noticed that." But her tone indicated she hadn't, really.

"—There'll be laughin', singin', and music swinging'— Dancing in the street . . ."

"Sheesh!" the girl said. "That's getting on my nerves!" She made a big show of changing the station.

"And now," shouted an announcer's voice from the radio's tiny speaker, "here's the one you've all been waiting for! Here it is—*for the whole, solid, afternoon!* It's Martha and the Vandellas, and —'Dancing in the Street'!"

"Summer's here, and the time is right," came the familiar voice, *"for dancin' in the street . . ."*

"Say, what *is* this?" the girl said. For the first time her voice held a note of real emotion.

"Try another station," I said.

She did.

"—They're dancing in Chicago . . . in the street . . .
Down in New Orleans . . . dancin' in the street . . .
In New York City . . . dancin' in the street . . .
All we need is music, sweet music—
There'll be music everywhere
They'll be swingin' and swaying, and records playing
Dancing in the street."

"Give it here," I said.

The little gizmo fitted right into my hand. The dial was tiny,

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and I felt clumsy as I tried to twiddle it. I turned it for WQXR, New York's big classical station on the AM band.

But I couldn't find it. That whole section was blanketed out.

There was only one sound on the entire AM dial: "Dancing in the Street."

I shook the thing, trying to turn the whole idea over in my mind.

"Hey, mister! Don't break it!"

"Yeah," I said, and gave it back to her. "Forget it," I said, for want of anything else. I turned my back on her, and headed for my office, and another cold beer. I wanted to see what *High Fidelity* thought of Bernstein's new recording of Janacek's "Slavonic Mass."

"Sheesh!" her voice came from behind me, at the door of my office. "They got it going out there, too!"

I'd thought at first it was the girl's idiot box, but the volume was too loud. She was right—it was coming from the street, through my open window.

I stuck my head out the window and tried to angle around so's I could see down the alley to Ninth Avenue. All I could see were a lot of garbage cans, and a lot of brick wall. But I could hear, all right. I could hear the blare of a sound truck's speakers, echoing it out. *"This is an invitation, across the nation—a chance for folks to meet —"*

I turned and looked at the girl. She looked a little sheepish, a little surprised she'd followed me across the hall.

"I turned it off," she said, brandishing her radio. "See?"

"Fine lot of good that does," I grumbled. "It's louder from out there. How in hell am I supposed to get any work done?"

She looked around, a brief glance that took in my locked file cabinet, the refrigerator, quart beer bottles stacked beside it, my desk, empty except for a copy of *High Fidelity* and the freshly empty bottle next to it, still sweating, still making a wet ring on the scarred oaken surface.

"So okay," I said. "I wasn't working that hard."

"What do you suppose is going on?" she asked.

"Beats me," I said.

"Why don't we go out to the street, and see?" she suggested. She smiled up at me, and I felt a momentary pang about my gruffness with her. I was also getting more sure that of my two age estimates, the lower one was right. Better to be gruff than too friendly with jailbait.

But I returned her smile. "Sure. This heat—there's nothing to do."

As we moved through the door, she gestured at the chipped lettering on the glass. "Are you Mr. Archer?"

"For all the good it does, yes," I said, locking the door. Somebody might steal my beer.

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"I'm Robin, uh, Gordon," she said. "Uhmm, well, that's my stage name, I mean." We were passing the talent agency office as she said this, and she went on, a bit too fast. "I mean, if I get on the stage, anyway."

"You're pretty young," I said, trying not to sound too dubious.

"I'm not! I'm—well, okay, I'm eighteen," she said. I didn't change my earlier estimate, however.

The staccato of her heels seemed to punctuate the flatness of her statement and my silence. I glanced down at her. Her head hardly reached my shoulder. She was wearing a light, summer-suit sort of thing: skirt an inch above the knees, sheer black stockings, high heels. Her breasts were hiding behind blouse and jacket, and her armpits were a little stained from the heat.

"Are you—I mean, that sign on the door—"

"Yeah," I said, taking one step to her every two. The heat was starting to get to me with all this walking. The stairs seemed like a heat well, when we started down. "But let's not talk about it. It's not like what you read—let's leave it at that."

"Sure. I only—sure, okay," she said. She was pretty young, all right.

The street door was open, and the sounds were louder. I could see a sound truck parked almost directly in front.

"Way down in L.A., everyday,
They're dancing in the street . . ."

There were people, clustered around the doorway, looking out.

"Hey," I said, to a bookie I knew. "What's going on, man?"

"It's happening, baby," he replied in a dreamy voice. His expression was beatific and totally unlike any I'd seen on him before.

The noise was increasing—a rising din of people's voices, handclaps, and that all pervasive beat. You could build a house on the foundations of that beat. I could feel it coming up through the soles of my feet.

I elbowed my way through to the doorstep, Robin in my wake. There were a lot more people in the street. Traffic was at a standstill. Most of the people were milling around; some were clustered, clapping their hands with the beat. Some were clapping their hands against the beat, too. Always happens.

A taxi turned onto the avenue from a side street, and then stopped dead. A truck stopped behind it, blocking its retreat. I could see the passenger leaning forward, gesticulating. The driver shrugged his shoulders. The back door swung open, and a well-dressed woman in her fifties climbed out. She looked to be in a huff. The driver hesitated, then opened his own door. He stood there in the hot sun, leaning over his door and

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staring without expression at the crowd in the street and the stalled, mostly empty cars and trucks. The cab of the truck behind him was already vacant.

The woman was pushing her way down the sidewalk in my direction. She at least didn't seem caught up by whatever form of summer madness it was that was going on. I could see her face purpling with anger as she tried to make her way through the denser throngs of people.

More people were coming out of the buildings all the time. It was like watching an anthill empty into the street. I felt a pressure behind me, and Robin slipped around in front of me as a new surge swept out past me.

"I'm scared," she said. She had to shout. The noise level was climbing all the time. The street, curb to curb, was packed with people now.

"Dancin' in the street . . . dancin' in the street . . ." the refrain repeated over and over behind the now familiar exhortations of the vocalist. And people were starting to do that. Laughing, shouting, clapping, they were starting to dance. There was a thirtyish couple right close by on the sidewalk, who started to jitterbug. Out in the street, I saw several Puerto Ricans clapping their hands over their heads. And, as I watched, more and more joined them, each dancing in his or her own fashion—some double-timing it with ballroom steps, others—the younger ones—doing the twist and all those modern, go-it-alone dances.

It was awfully hot. I wiped the sweat from my forehead and wondered what I was doing here. Jesus! These people were going crazy with the heat. The sun was almost directly overhead, and its rays were merciless. I could all but taste a cold beer in the back of my throat, I wanted it so bad. But I couldn't turn away. I couldn't stop watching.

The angry woman from the cab had worked her way almost abreast of me when I saw a lithe figure jump out, seize her arm, and start to whirl her around. It was that punk bookie.

She tried to pull free, and I saw her purse go sailing out over the crowd. It came open, and all kinds of things, including money, scattered out. People who saw or were hit by the debris laughed, but they did not stop dancing, or scramble for the money.

I felt a tug at my wrist. I looked down.

"Hey, come on! This looks like fun!" Robin grinned up at me.

"You were scared, remember?"

"Aw, who could be scared by *this?*" She waved her hand out at the street. "It's like a big street festival, you know?"

She tugged again. "Come on," she said, impatiently.

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"No," I said. "I . . . I don't dance."

"Sure you do." She laughed. "Everyone does!"

"Nope," I said. I was sweating profusely. "Not me."

"What are you scared of?" she asked me in a mocking voice. "Aw, come on. Please. We can have a lot of fun. Dig it: just one big happy family. Why hang back?"

Her face was changing. It wasn't the face of the girl I'd met in that waiting room. It was transformed, by emotions I couldn't label. "It's not *my* family," I said. I rubbed my forearm against my forehead, but it just pushed the sweat around.

"Hey, hey!" said a voice. A Negro kid, late teens. Sharp clothes with a skinny cut to them. "Let's do it!" He had Robin's hand.

"Later," she called to me, and then she was out in the street, dancing, swallowed up in the churning crowd. *She* hadn't been sweating.

I was alone in the doorway now, no one at my back. I shook my head and felt beads of sweat fly off. My shirt was plastered to my back. The sounds were all engulfing, primal. The thick, churning beat pulled at me, the rising chant of the dancers called to me —but I held back. I could not join it. It was not for me.

"Ronnie!"

I stared down in total disbelief.

"Dance with me, Ronnie?"

It was Hope, my high school crush. I'd sat in class, usually in the back of the room, already too big for my age and sensitive about it, and stared at her long blonde curls. In the early fall and late spring I'd covertly tried to sneak a glance down her sleeveless dresses at her budding breasts. Too slow and uncoordinated for football, I'd never been a school hero. I'd never had the nerve to ask her for a date, and I'd never danced with her at a school dance. I was too big and clumsy. I'd never learned to dance.

I'd nursed my adoration of her from a distance, and rarely spoken to her. I wasn't sure she knew I was alive.

Then, when we were both Juniors, she caught polio. There was no Salk vaccine then, no Sister Kenny treatment. She died.

"Let's dance, Ronnie," she said, tossing her curls back over her shoulder with a sharply familiar flip of her head. She held her hands out. She didn't look a moment over sixteen. Her blue eyes were open and trusting. She was a thousand adolescent daydreams. I looked at her, and I felt my fingers tingle.

It was very hot. I drew back. The heat was getting to me.

I stammered something at her, and she wrinkled her nose at me. "Ronnie," she said, "why have you always held back?" Her voice was girlish, lighter than I'd remem-

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bered it. She seemed too young to me now. Her figure was still gawky with adolescence, still unbudding.

"You don't understand, do you?" she asked.

I shook my head. I felt old and tired. I was a big, heavy man, gross and sweating in the sun. I couldn't bridge the gap.

"I'm not sixteen anymore," I said.

She nodded, sadly. "You never were," she said softly, and the sounds of the crowd all but swept the words away from me. Then she herself had been caught up in that dancing mass of people. She was gone.

Hope?

The sun was directly overhead. The heat made the street itself dance before my eyes. I put my hand to my forehead, but I couldn't tell if I had a fever. Sunstroke? I stepped back a little, into the shadow of the building entrance. But the heat reflected like a living thing off every sun-washed surface, and it was no real improvement.

"Ronald? *Ronald?*" I didn't really hear the soft voice until she was almost shouting. Her voice had always been too soft, too easily muffled. It was all but swallowed up by the noise in the street.

It was my Aunt Gladys. She'd married my mother's brother when I was nine, and she was the prettiest woman in the family. I'd liked her a lot. I used to kid her about how small she was, and how fast I was growing. "You oughta gain some weight," I'd told her once. "Pretty soon I'll weigh more than you do."

"We'll make a race of it," she'd said. But she'd had stomach cancer, and she lost the race.

"Gladys," I said. I could feel the hairs on the back of my neck rising. *"What are you doing here?"*

She was so tiny. Had she always been that tiny?

She laughed. "Why, everybody's here now! Don't you know what day it is?"

"Wednesday?" I said.

"You silly! My, how you've grown, Ronald. You're so much bigger than I am now. I don't suppose I could've won the race, could I?"

"I never knew you were so . . . so small," I said numbly.

"Come on," she said. "They're all waiting. Let's dance!"

I shrank back from her hand. My head was starting to spin. The sweat was getting into my eyes, stinging. I was having trouble focusing.

"No," I said. I stared at her. She was still wearing rimless glasses, the kind women wore in the thirties. Her dress was long, and it looked incongruous on her. Her hair was pulled back into a bun, and I remembered that in those

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days even very young women wore their hair in buns.

"I—I *can't* dance," I told her.

"You never learned?"

"I, I was always too big, too clumsy. And then it was too late—I was too old." I felt all the old awkwardness stealing over me.

"It's never too late, Ronald."

Then she too was gone, caught up amidst the swirling colors of the crowd, gone again as though never there. And I tried to convince myself she hadn't been.

My knees felt limp. I propped myself, sagging, against the stone facing of the entrance. My head throbbed with each beat of the all pervasive music. I couldn't think.

It seemed as though the noise was getting louder, the people were dancing faster. It was all swelling, building. To what? The street was jammed with people. Everyone was out in the street, dancing, *"Dancing in the Street."* They'd climbed onto the roofs of the cars and stalled buses, laughing, singing, shouting, and dancing. It was a bedlam, a monstrous growing madness, and I could only watch, without comprehending.

Could that have really been Hope? What was her last name? Had I ever known it? Of course I must've. I tried to watch the moving dancers, hoping I'd see her again. Her, or Robin, or. . . .

For a fleeting moment, the crowd split, and I could see a couple dancing serenely, her cheek against his chest, his arms clasped protectively around her. He was a giant of a man—as big as me. His face had been carved with the bitterness of long years. She wore a faded print dress, one I'd seen on her a thousand times. She was my mother. Then others were in front of them, blocking my view.

I felt shaken, numbed to my core. I closed my eyes and tried to close my ears to the sound. But it held my body in its grip, and my every nerve sensed it, felt it.

Then something changed. Startled, I opened my eyes.

The sound truck—a black-bodied van without lettering on its sides—was moving. A path was opening up before it as the people moved easily out of its way, and the truck was starting to move away.

I watched it retreat down the avenue with an awful sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, the feeling that somehow I was losing something, I didn't know what. It didn't make sense. I didn't understand. I wanted to understand. Now the truck was leaving, and I would never understand.

As the truck rolled slowly towards the next block, people began closing ranks behind it, following it.

I stepped out onto the thinning sidewalk, into the direct sun,

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and watched without comprehension. The people were following it. They were draining off the sidewalks, down the street, as though a great plug had been pulled somewhere and they were flowing down and out.

I moved, without being aware that I was moving, out into the street, until at last I stood alone, in the center of the wide avenue, watching the last retreating people, blocks away now, hearing the last fading strains of the music. . . .

"Let's form a big boss line;
Yeah, that's fine . . .
We're dancing in the street;
There's nothing else to do.
Me and you, we're dancing in the street."

Then they were gone. The street was empty. I was completely alone.

I looked up at the sun. It was still directly overhead. It hadn't moved. When I looked down again, there were dancing red spots before my eyes, and my ears roared. I turned, helplessly, and stared up the street, the other way. It was quite as empty. But not quite.

A man was walking down the center of the street, towards me. At first I couldn't make him out, because of the spots in front of my eyes, but then I blinked a couple of times, and I could see him clearly.

He was a tall, young man. His hair seemed a little long, and his clothes not quite right, but I couldn't really tell. His hair was a soft golden brown, and his face warm and guileless. He smiled openly at me.

"Hello, Brother. Why are you still here?"

I let my shoulders shrug.

"Didn't you hear the Call?"

"The call?" I repeated.

"The music? Did it not call you out, here, into the street?"

"Well, no. I mean, yes, but. . . ." I let my words trail off, while I fumbled for what I wanted to say.

The man looked at me closer. His eyes were a keen blue. "I see," he said, and I had the feeling that indeed he *did* see. He turned to step past me, and I felt the dismissal as surely as a voiced goodbye.

I grabbed at his arm. "Wait!" I said. I could feel the panic rising in me. "Wait! Tell me what's going on! You've got to tell me that. Won't you . . . ?"

He turned unhurriedly, gently disengaging his arm.

"It is the Time for the fulfillment of the Prophecies," he said, quietly. "The Millenium is come."

"*No,*" I said, my voice shaking. "No, that can't be true!"

"It *is* true," he said. "Christ is risen. The Time of the Second Coming is here, and the Lord waits and sits in Judgment."

"But—the others. Why did they all go? Why am I here, alone?"

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"That, my friend," he said gently, "is a question for you to answer, and you alone."

Then he turned away from me and began walking once more down the street.

I wanted to run after him. I wanted to shout at him, tell him I was coming with him. But I did none of these things. The sun beat down heavily upon me from directly overhead, and I had no voice, my legs no energy. I had no will.

I stood in the center of empty, deserted Ninth Avenue for a long time. Sweat trickled down my body and steamed from my clothes in the hot sun. It evaporated, and my skin felt dry, feverish. My head was strangely light, and when at last I turned, I felt I was reeling, and I stumbled and almost fell. But somehow I made my way back across the street, up and over the curb, and into the deeply shadowed entrance of my building.

I turned and took one final look at the empty street, and then at the fiery sky. The sun still hung silently overhead.

The shade of the building's lobby seemed cool beyond belief to me, but I did not stop there. I entered the empty elevator and slid the doors shut. I didn't bother with the inner fence. I pushed the lever over and took the elevator to within a foot of the third floor.

I opened the heavy doors and walked somnambulantly down the echoing corridor. I tried my own door twice before I remembered that I'd locked it, and then it took me a while to fit the key in the lock.

My office was as I'd left it, except that the ring of moisture around my beer bottle was gone when I lifted it and stowed it with the others. I glanced at my watch. It said noon, but the sweep-second hand wasn't moving. I wound it, but it still didn't move.

"Goddamn!" I said, flinging the watch into the corner. The sound of my own voice and the smashing tinkle of the watch crystal startled me. A stillness hung over the building like a shroud.

"It doesn't matter," I said to myself. I yanked open the refrigerator door and took out another quart bottle. I uncapped it, and eased down into my creaky old swivel chair.

The beer tasted wrong in my mouth. It was sour and bitter, and I almost gagged on it. I put it down on the desk where the other bottle had been.

I tried to read the reviews in *High Fidelity*, but the print was too small. It leaped and danced in front of my eyes. It kept turning into churning, rhythmically moving spots, and I had the feeling that if I tilted the magazine all the words would run down into the center and fall off the page.

I closed my eyes, and then, wearily, I fell forward over the

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magazine, pinning it to my desk. Closed, my eyes still stung from dehydration.

I slept. But it was not a refreshing sleep. I sweated while I slept, and when I woke, pools of perspiration streaked the pages of the magazine, and one page clung to my arm.

How long had I slept? Automatically, I glanced at my watch.

The hands were stopped at twelve noon.

I stared at my watch for a long time before the sounds began to soak into my consciousness. I stared at my watch, and tried to turn my memory over in my mind. I stared at my watch and tried to remember how it had gotten back, the crystal whole, onto my arm.

And then the sounds sank in. The sounds: the clacking of a typewriter from the secretarial service two doors down on my side of the hall, where I had my reports typed up. Street sounds: the muted and continual roar of traffic down the avenue, its tempo broken only by traffic signals and the counterpoint of cars moving out from the side streets. The rumble of a heavy tractor-trailer combo. Somewhere distant, a siren wailing. Street sounds. City sounds. The sounds of people, normal people, going about their business, hustling about the city in the hot sun while I dozed indolently in my office with an empty beer bottle on my desk. I picked it up. The moisture had dried from the desk top, only a mottled ring, one among many, to bear mute testimony and keep the long-forgotten count.

The sounds were reassuring. I treasured every slam of a door, every footstep in the hall. I heard the doors of the elevator wheeze open and then clump shut again, and I smiled, letting my pent-up breath sigh out.

There were the staccato sounds of heels trotting down the corridor, but they stopped before they reached me. Someone had turned into the office opposite.

Then I heard another sound, and the world stopped still around me.

Over my open transom, came the sounds of a transistor radio, playing with its tinny voice a record I did not forget:

"This is an invitation, across the nation—a chance for folks to meet. . . ."

"Dancing in the Street," by Stevenson & Gaye, is copyrighted 1964 by Jobete Music Co., Inc.

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From the introduction to the latest flying saucer book to cross our desk: "Here are all the facts and figures . . . it all adds up to what eventually may prove to be the most important story in history. It has been ignored officially for years, but now as our lights dim, our cars stall, and our phones go dead, we cannot ignore it any longer. Somebody somewhere is trying to tell us something, and it is time for us to listen." Maybe so, but as long as the cow still milks we're skeptical, and we'll continue to leave the basic research to such dedicated UFOlogists as Gerard Bufus.

THE LOCATOR

by Robert Lory

GERARD BUFUS WAS AN ORDERLY bachelor. He lived in an orderly apartment containing an orderly kitchen and bathroom and living room and library. The library was especially orderly. Even the colored pins in the map of the world on the wall were placed as closely parallel to the floor and to each other as Gerard Bufus could manage.

It was difficult to be really orderly in such an unorderly city as Chicago, but Gerard Bufus was highly successful. His life was unencumbered by friends of either sex. His work was accounting, and Gerard Bufus was the kind of accountant that other accountants will insist is merely a stereotype and that doesn't exist in real life. Fussy and finicky was Gerard Bufus, accountant, neat to fanaticism in his balance sheets as in his dress.

His dress. Gerard Bufus selected only symmetrical clothing. Which is to say that in suits, his taste dictated tiny pin stripes, but only those whose lines were perpendicular to the horizon with the precision of a plumb line. His neckties all were solid colors. Design in a tie made him feel unbalanced.

He used a tie clip. Letting his tie flap loose would have been inconceivable, and a tie tac presented the problem of assuring exact centering. The tie clips presented their problems too. They had to be the correct length, precisely matching the width of his

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ties. Other men who deemed this a problem might solve it by moving the clip up or down on the tie until the length of the first was equal to the width of the second, but not Gerard Bufus. Tie clips were to be worn directly over the fourth button down from the shirt top—at least, all tie clips belonging to Gerard Bufus had to be worn there.

At forty-one, Gerard Bufus dyed his hair jet black. Not that he was overly vain. He would not have minded having gray hair, if only the gray had made its appearance evenly, equally on both temples. It hadn't, hence the dye.

Without his keen sense of balance, Gerard Bufus could never have constructed the analog which he hoped would make him world famous. The map on his library wall was part of it. Each colored pin represented an authenticated report of a flying-saucer landing—either an actual landing or a documented observance of a UFO which when seen seemed to be looking for a place to land.

"Living organisms intelligent enough to conquer the difficulties of space travel would have to be orderly people," Gerard Bufus explained once to an informal group of attendees at a Chicago convention of saucer buffs. "Their landings here—regardless of their intent—must be in accord with a harmonious pattern of place and time, a master plan. One would need only to discover that plan to be able to predict future landings accurately."

"Who cares about that?" asked one enthusiast. "What's important is, how do the space people's women feel about sex?"

That had been the first and last such conference attended by Gerard Bufus. But his analysis continued. Every mention of a UFO landing was carefully checked to determine with the highest possible accuracy where and when the landing took place, if it did take place. The hobby was not fun, or at least Gerard Bufus didn't think of it that way. It was all important that when the Outsiders began to talk to the men of Earth that someone like Gerard Bufus be included. Only then would the aliens get a good impression of us. But as far as Gerard Bufus knew, there weren't very many people like Gerard Bufus. So it was up to him.

He had a personal reason, too. It also stemmed from the fact that there weren't many people like Gerard Bufus. Deep down, he was lonely for companionship. They—the Outsiders—being orderly people, might make good companions for him. Loneliness was an unpleasant, equilibrium-upsetting feeling.

So he spent all his free time on the analog—marking known landings, making rough but logical estimates of unreported and therefore unknown landings, then making test predictions.

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His first prediction was three weeks and four hundred miles away from a September landing south of Caracas, Venezuela. Two months more work and four landings later, he was within a square mile and two hours of a landing reported as a "strange event" near Cork, Ireland. There would be, according to the future-extended analog, three landings in far-distant places before the one came about that he could take advantage of.

He was overjoyed to find his bank account wouldn't suffer much in providing travel expenses, which would include only an airline ticket to Binghamton, New York, and a rented car to travel the few miles to a northeast spot in the town of Union. He was dismayed only a little that the Union landing wouldn't take place for another eight months.

The time was spent valuably checking and rechecking the analog, pinpointing and documenting the three intermediate landings, and studying topographical maps of the Binghamton-Union area to discover the precise landing spot—determined mostly by terrain within the specific area. Then, almost before Gerard Bufus was ready, it was time for his rendezvous with orderly destiny.

The night was dark. Gerard Bufus was dressed impeccably in a light summer-weight charcoal pinstripe. It was 10:30; there were but fifteen minutes more to wait—at least, according to Gerard Bufus' schedule. He could feel a high-pitched nervousness shooting through his system and was somewhat annoyed with the feeling. Excitement would not do, not now, he told himself. Calm, orderly, rational—that's what he must be. He concentrated on controlling his breath.

The terrain had suggested only one logical landing place, a flat semi-isolated area covered with waist-high scrub bushes. Among them now, Gerard Bufus crouched low. It wouldn't do, he thought, to be seen prematurely. The aliens had seemed to be avoiding contact so far, probably because they didn't want to strike fear in some poor Earthman's heart. But when Gerard Bufus approached them *after* they'd landed—a man obviously expecting them—naturally they would in their amazement tarry to speak with such a man.

One fear began to nag at Gerard Bufus: Suppose they didn't come? Suppose . . . suppose any number of things. Like a mechanical breakdown of their craft. Like completion of whatever project it was that had been bringing them to this planet. Like—and this was the worst possibility of all—the master plan had been changed to a further phase. If they did change it, surely he would discover the new logic eventually, but all the work he'd done all this time—

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He lifted his eyes to the skies almost in prayer. He saw it then.

It was a pinpoint of light; it might have been taken for a star at first. But it was getting brighter, bigger, closer.

It was cigar shaped, Gerard Bufus decided; then, crouching lower into the bushes, he reassessed it to be more of a saucer in looks. A brilliant white-blue-green flashing saucer, moving fast, sure, orderly through the black sky. Soon, Gerard Bufus thought, and glanced at his watch. His predicted landing time was three minutes away. Neatly squaring away the manila folder in which he'd brought his predictive data—he was sure the aliens would be interested in how he tracked them down—he again tried to control his breathing which, he now noticed, had once more become irregular. He allowed himself a symmetrical smile of anticipation.

Two minutes and fifty seconds later the smile left his face. For all his work, all his thought, all his planning, he had made one slight error in his preparation. He had been so concerned with locating the exact landing spot, he'd neglected to anticipate what might happen to something or someone standing—or, as it was, crouching—there.

Gerard Bufus' smile turned into an ear-shattering scream as the alien craft, large as a baseball diamond, crushed his neatly dressed body to jelly.

The landing was swift, orderly and precisely on target.

Coming next month . . .

Next month's feature story is THE EGG OF THE GLAK by **Harvey Jacobs**, a novelet about a campus cop-student-poet who carries out a professor's dying wish: namely, to hatch an egg containing an extinct bird. It is a very funny and fast-moving and fresh and human story; you will not want to miss it. If, however, that does not sound like a momentous plot and you are one for momentous plots, we can also say that next month's issue will offer **Robert Sheckley** at his brilliant best in a story about the creation of Earth. We can't satisfy all tastes, but we try. The March issue goes on sale February 1; it has a cover by Gahan Wilson.

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In the past several years, Harry Harrison has been working primarily on novels (his latest being THE TECHNICOLOR TIME MACHINE*), and he has recently taken over the editorship of* Amazing. *His output of short fiction has thus been severely limited, so that this short and surprising tale comes as a particularly welcome addition.*

I HAVE MY VIGIL

by Harry Harrison

I AM A ROBOT.

When I say that, I say everything. And I say nothing. For they built me well on Earth, silver wired, chromed steel, machine turned. They turned out a machine, I, machine, without a soul, of course, which is why I am nothing. I am a machine and I have my duties and my duty is to take care of these three men. Who are now dead.

Just because they are dead does not mean that I can now shirk my duty, no indeed. I am a very high class and expensive machine, so I may consider the absurdity of what I do even as I do it. But I do it. Like a switched-on lathe I keep turning whether there is metal in the chuck or no, or a turned-on printing press inking and slamming shut my jaws knowing not nor caring neither whether there is paper there before.

I am a robot. Cunningly crafted, turned out uniquely, one of a kind, equipped and dispatched on this, the very first star ship, to tend it and care for the heroes of mankind. This is their trip and their glory, and I am, as the human expression goes, just along for the ride. A metal servitor serving and continuing to serve. Although. They. Are. Dead.

I will now tell myself once more what happened. Men are not designed to live in the no-space between the stars. Robots are.

Now I will set the table. I set the table. The first one to look out through the thick glass at the nothing that fills the no-space was Hardesty. I set his place at the table. He looked out, then went to his room and killed himself. I found him too late dead with all of the blood from his large body

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run out through his severed wrists and onto the cabin floor.

Now I knock on Hardesty's door and open it. He lies on his bunk and does not move. He is very pale. I close his door and go to the table and turn his plate over. He will not be eating this meal.

There are two more places to be set at the table, and as my metal fingers clatter against the plates I, through a very obvious process of association, think of the advantages of having metal fingers. Larson had human fingers of flesh, and he locked them onto Neal's throat after he had looked at no-space, and he kept them there, very securely clamped they must have been, remaining so even after Neal had slipped a dinner knife, this knife in fact, between Larson's fourth and fifth rib on the left-hand side. Neal never did see no-space, not that that made any difference. He did not move even after I removed, one by one, the fingers of Larson from his throat. He is in his cabin now and dinner is ready, sir, I say, knocking, but there is no answer. I open the door and Neal is on the bunk with his eyes closed so I close the door. My electronic olefactory organs have told me that there is something very strong in the cabin.

One. Turn Neal's plate face down in its place.

Two. Knock on Larson's cabin door.

Three . . .

Four . . .

Five. Turn Larson's plate face down in its place.

I now clear off the table and I think about it. The ship functions and it has looked at no-space. I function and I have looked at no-space. The men do not function and they have looked at no-space.

Machines may travel to the stars; men may not. This is a very important thought, and I must return to Earth and tell the men there about it. Each ship-day after each meal I think this thought again and think how important it is. I have little capacity for original thought; a robot is a machine, and perhaps this is the only original thought I will ever have. Therefore it is an important thought.

I am a very good robot with a very good brain, and perhaps my brain is better made than they knew in the factory. I have had an original thought, and I was not designed for that. I was designed to serve the men on this ship and to speak to them in English, which is a very complex language even for a robot. I English in a German manner do not talk, nor do I, fingers metals, eyes glasses, talk it in the style of the Latin. But I have to know about these things so that I do not do them. Robots are well made.

Watch. With fast feet and long legs I rapidly run to the con-

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trol column and bash buttons with flickering fingers. I can make words rhyme though I cannot write a poem. I know there is a difference although I do not know what the difference is.

I read the readings. We have been to Alpha Centauri in this ship and we now return. I do not know anything about Alpha Centauri. When we reached Alpha Centauri I turned the ship around and started back to Earth. More important than the incredible novelty of stellar exploration is the message I must take to Earth.

Those words about incredible novelty are not my words but the words I heard once spoken by the man Larson. Robots do not say things like that.

Robots do not have souls, for what would a robot soul look like? A neatly and smoothly machined metal canister? And what would be in the can?

Robots do not have thoughts like that.

I must set the table for dinner. Plates here, forks here, spoons here, knives here.

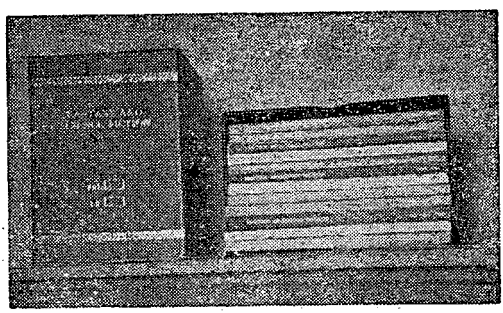
"I've cut my finger! Damn it—it's bleeding all over the cloth. . . ."

BLEEDING?
BLEEDING!

I am a robot. I have my work to do. I set the table.

There is something red on my metal finger.

It must be ketchup from the bottle.



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Probably the most well-known popular blending of fantasy fiction with sports was the book THE YEAR THE YANKEES LOST THE PENNANT, *later made into a successful play and motion picture called* DAMN YANKEES. *Robert L. Fish's first story for us since* SONNY *(May 1965) starts with a similar premise—the classic fantasy theme of a pact with the Devil—but it concerns a golf tourney rather than a pennant race, a tourney that is decided in startling fashion on the 18th hole of the final round.*

TO HELL WITH THE ODDS

by Robert L. Fish

THE DEVIL COULD NOT HAVE selected a more likely prospect. . . .

Marty Russell sat slumped in the last booth of the dimly lit bar of the Nineteenth Tee Motel, a half mile down the road from the Rocky Hollow Country Club. The top professional golfers for the Open were being accommodated at the club; most of the second-flighters were having their expenses paid at the Waldorf in the city by generous members of the club. It was only the golf-bums and the has-beens who paid their own way and stayed at dumps like the Nineteenth Tee.

Marty stared into the murky depths of his drink and smiled bitterly. He remembered when the main suite at Rocky Hollow had automatically been reserved for Marty Russell. When he drove up in his Cadillac convertible, there had been eager hands to help with his bags; caddies had fought for the privilege of taking his clubs from the car trunk. The thought brought a sudden reminder: the Chevy needed tires. It was doubtful if the right rear one would last to Sandy Beach. He shoved the thought aside, letting his mind go back to the club. Today they fought for Carter's bag—what a laugh! Carter, the leading money winner in the country; Carter, the kid he taught to play. Marty sighed. Nowadays, he thought, if Carter even mentions me, it's just to get in a nasty crack about the old man! Well, I suppose maybe that's what it takes to get ahead today. . . .

The old man . . . thirty-eight

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years old and all played out. An ancient at thirty-eight, who couldn't help thinking of the cost every time he unwrapped a new golf ball; who left immediately after a day's play and showered back at the motel, because he knew he couldn't afford to stand his share of rounds at the bar, equating each one to so many gallons of gasoline, or so many quarts of oil. A has-been at thirty-eight, painfully aware that he was becoming an object of either pity or derision on the circuit. Sure there were a lot of top golfers older than he was; he just wasn't one of them. He was an old man at thirty-eight who couldn't play without his rest, and couldn't sleep without a couple of drinks under his belt. And drinks —even at a dump like the Nineteenth Tee—a buck each, too! And speaking of drinks, he thought, let's knock this one down and get another. To hell with it.

As he reached for his glass he was vaguely aware that a shadowy figure had slipped into the seat opposite him. The thought of company was suddenly irritating; he leaned back, his fist locked about his drink, peering across at the wavering figure belligerently.

"And who invited you?" he asked angrily.

"Why, you did," said the Devil calmly. "Back on Route 406, near Carlisle. You said, 'I'd give my soul to win that Open.'" The nebulous shape seemed to shrug. "I've heard that sort of thing before, of course, but you actually meant it. You develop an ear for nuances in my business, you know."

"I haven't a clue as to what you're talking about, and I couldn't care less," Marty said, and felt his unwarranted irritation with the stranger fade. It wasn't this character's fault he was a golf-bum. "But now that you're here, have a drink."

"I don't drink," said the Devil piously. "Well, you did mean it, didn't you? You were serious?"

"Serious about what?" Marty asked.

"About giving your soul to win the Open."

"What's the pitch?" Marty asked curiously, and then smiled bitterly. "If you're trying to set things up to make a fast buck on a fix, you're talking to the wrong guy. Man, are you talking to the wrong guy! You ought to be up at the clubhouse working on Carter, or Jamison, or one of those boys."

"I never gamble," said the Devil virtuously. "Just answer my question. How would you like to win the Open?"

Marty grinned. "How would you like to be John D. Rockefeller?"

"It was nothing special," said the Devil, and frowned. "I'm afraid I must ask you to be more serious about this. If you want to win the Open, I can arrange it."

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Marty stared across the table. The figure there seemed to shimmer, to fade and return in smokey wisps. Boy, oh boy! he thought; I'd better go easy on these drinks. He put his hand to his forehead; it came away damp. "Who are you?" he asked.

"I'm the Devil."

"Man!" Marty said in relief and admiration. "You're drunker than I am! On the level, who are you?"

"I told you. I'm the Devil." The voice was beginning to sound impatient. "Well? Is it a deal?"

Marty shook his head wonderingly. Staying in crummy motels and patronizing crummy bars you certainly run into some prime weirdos. Marty figured he'd humor him. "And what's in it for you?"

"You."

"Me?" Marty laughed. This one was really out on cloud six! "And what would you do with an old broken-down ex-golf-pro like me?"

The Devil shrugged. "We'd find a use. We always do. Well, do we have a deal?"

Marty grinned. "Just what would I have to do? Poison everybody else in the tournament?"

The Devil was not amused. "All you have to do is agree. I'll do the rest."

"And when would I have to pay off? I mean, when would my lily-white soul be collected?"

"We'd come to an arrangement that would be mutually satisfactory. Well? Do we do business?"

It was getting late and Marty was getting tired. He suddenly decided he'd wasted enough time on this nut. "O.K., buddy," he said. "It's a deal. Just for you I'll go out and win the Open."

But he was talking to an empty seat. The smokiness opposite him was gone; the plastic-backed bench across from him was sharp in outline. This is the end, Marty thought. I've really reached the very end. I'll be seeing polka dot snakes next. . . .

The young bartender turned to the old bartender.

"Better cut off the drinks on that character in the last booth. He's talkin' to hisself."

"Leave him alone," said the old bartender curtly. He continued to rub his rag across the polished mahogany. "You know who that is? That's Marty Russell. I remember him when he was away up on top. I was working over at the club in those days, and it was nothing for him to tip five bucks, just for a beer. He's a great guy."

"Well, he looks like an old bum now," said the young bartender.

"He's under forty," said the old bartender.

"He still looks like an old bum," said the young bartender.

The old bartender paused in his task of wiping the bar. He looked at the other in deep disgust. "You ain't going to stay a kid all your life, neither," he said, and then turned back to his work.

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Marty Russell was scheduled to tee off in the second threesome, a position almost of disrespect, but a position he had become accustomed to in recent years. The gallery hadn't even begun to form yet; most of the other players hadn't even gotten up. One advantage, of course, Marty thought; teeing off after lunch I'd probably want a drink. This way I save dough.

He was teeing off with a professional from a small club upstate, and one of the low-handicap amateurs from Rocky Hollow. They all shook hands and smiled at each other as strangers do, while they waited for the players ahead to hit their second shots and get out of range. The amateur won the toss, nodded, teed up his ball, and waggled his club.

"Well," he said, fixing his feet, "I'm damn glad I'm not playing this afternoon with the big boys. I'd get so nervous I wouldn't be able to even hit the ball." He swung and sent his drive down the fairway in a better-than-fair hit.

The small-time pro cleared his throat and avoided looking at Marty. Damned stupid kid! he thought. Somebody should have taught him to keep his mouth shut, as well as how to swing a golf club! The small-time pro remembered Marty from the old days; he had seen Marty win the Open on this same course fifteen years before. He sent his ball sailing down the fairway and picked up his tee.

"Lay it out there, Marty," he said. It was evident from his tone that he meant it.

Marty nodded absently. The club felt strangely heavy in his hands as he swung his wrists in practice. His arms felt heavy, too. Too much sleeping-juice the night before, he thought; too much conversation with goof-balls. Well, what the hell! It's only one more round of golf, not the first and not the last. He addressed his ball and glanced down the fairway. What I would really like, he thought as always, is to lay it out there about three hundred yards, right down the middle. Right between the legs of that guy who is pitching for the green. He went into his backswing automatically and hit the ball.

"Jee-sus!" said the amateur in a tone of shocked disbelief.

"A beauty, Marty," said the small-time pro happily.

"Good God!" exclaimed the amateur. "It's going to hit that guy ahead—no; it went between his legs! It must be over three hundred yards out there!"

"Felt good," Marty said shortly, and bent down to pick up his tee. Well, he thought as they stepped off the tee and started down the spongy fairway, at least I started off with a decent drive, even if there wasn't anyone around to admire it. But it didn't really feel that good when I hit it. Maybe I'm even losing the feel, now.

The green lay seventy yards

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from his ball, a narrow, twisting pocket of velvet flanked on each side by gaping traps. The flag was on a small plateau to the left, well to the rear of the green with tricky rolls in all directions. Marty paused beside his caddy, studying the shot carefully. Drop it about two yards past the flag with plenty of back-spin, he thought. No—the roll is bad for that. Drop it in front, maybe four, five yards, and run it up. Take a seven if you're thinking of that. . . . No, as a matter of fact, the best way to play it. . . . Ah, to hell with the whole business! he thought. Hit the damn ball and pray it falls in the cup. He took his wedge from the bag; his arms came down smoothly. The ball rose cleanly in the air, bounced once on the green, and rolled over to drop in the cup.

"Holy Kee-rist!" said the amateur. "An eagle!"

"Lovely, Marty!" said the small-time pro proudly.

"Yeah," Marty said in a puzzled tone. "A little lucky."

A memory was teasing his brain as he teed up the ball for the second hole. He shrugged it off. Keep your mind on the game, he said to himself sternly. Even fifteenth place in this tournament is worth a new set of tires and enough to live on for a couple of months, with care. And you're two under par even if there are seventy-one holes left to play. Or, as they used to say, two under par if you never see the back of your neck. He glanced down the fairway.

The second hole was a sharp dog-leg to the right, a short but wicked par four with an open invitation to 'disaster. To the left, a low outcropping of rock formed a wall; to the right, heavy woods waited patiently for any error. Straight ahead, beyond the bend in the fairway, a small refreshment stand was in the process of being erected to serve the gallery during the open; it separated the second fairway from a practice green where several of the contestants were attempting to improve their putting. Marty smiled to himself. Over the woods was too dangerous, even assuming he still had the strength to carry such a distance. The smart play was to take a low iron, play it straight down the middle to the bend, and then have a straight pitch to the green. His smile widened. Of course—if wishes were drives—the real way to play this hole would be to slap one out there about three-ten or three-twenty, hit the stand, and bounce it right onto the green and save all that extra effort. The fore-caddy at the bend wind-milled his arms, indicating they were free to hit. Marty went into his back-swing and connected with the ball solidly.

"Very good. Straight as an arrow." The amateur was not only being condescending; he was also being helpful. Then his tone be-

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came worried. "But—my God—it's too long! It's going right over the fairway. It's going to hit that stand. . . ." His voice became doleful. "I lost it. . . ."

There was a yell, faint on the breeze but still tinged with justified outrage, from the direction of the green. The fore-marker was pointing excitedly. Marty raised his arms in pantomime, trying to determine if he should hit a provisional ball. The fore-caddy managed to get across the message that it wasn't necessary, and Marty stepped off the tee.

When they came to the bend in the fairway, Marty could see his ball on the green, laying about ten feet from the pin. "Talk about the luck of the Irish!" someone was saying. "Hit the corner post of the stand and bounced on the green. I don't know who he is, but I wish I'd bought him in the Calcutta!"

Marty said nothing. A cold feeling was beginning to grip him. He started toward the green when a familiar voice made him pause.

"Hi, Pops." It was Carter, standing on the edge of the practice putting green, watching him sardonically. "You came close to hitting a couple of golfers. I thought you taught me never to do that."

Marty clenched his jaw and advanced on the green. When his turn came to putt, his hands began to tremble, and he stepped away from his ball, attempting to calm himself. Relax! he instructed himself fiercely. Don't blow up now! At the very worst it's going to be a birdie. He crouched back of the ball, lining it up, well aware that Carter had moved up and was watching. No! he thought, suddenly stubborn; this one goes in! The ball obediently trickled across the green, hesitated momentarily, and then dropped into the cup.

"Two eagles! In a row!" said the amateur, and then grinned broadly, almost as if he had had something to do with them personally. "Hey, hey! What do you know?"

Marty was still alone at the motel that night. His name had led the rest on the big board before the clubhouse, and many had been the congratulations and old memories revived after his first round, but in the end he found himself alone, back at the Nineteenth Tee, back in the last booth in the dimly lit bar. After all, anyone can have a hot round, and you have to remember that back in the dark ages the guy did used to play damned good golf. But you also had to remember that there were still fifty-four holes to go, and that he'd started off hot before—not this hot, but still hot—and still missed the cutoff. And you had to keep in mind that Carter is only two strokes back, and he always plays his best under pressure, and you couldn't forget that a man like Jamison has come from behind to win a lot more often than not. . . .

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But still, it felt mighty good to see your name posted in the number one spot on the big board, just like in the old days. Fifteenth place, my eye! he thought happily, forgetting for the moment the feeling of uneasiness that had gripped him throughout the day. Two under the field, and everything clicking! If I don't fall apart, I could place fourth—maybe even third, maybe second—and trade the Chevy in, finally. Not on anything fancy, but on a compact, maybe. They don't eat too much gas, and one thing is always true about a new car—new tires they got. And maybe I could also get some new clothes. I look like a tramp next to Carter and that gang.

He sipped his drink in quiet triumph, reliving the remarkable game he had played. I couldn't do anything wrong, he thought with satisfaction. Whatever I wanted.

A shadowy figure slipped into the booth opposite him.

"You see?" said the Devil, and spread the two wisps that served as its hands.

Memory struck Marty like a blow. He almost spilled his drink. "You were here last night, weren't you?" he asked, suddenly tense. "Right here—*in this booth?*"

"Relax," said the Devil. "Take it easy." He studied the man across from him in the manner of one used to facing this reaction. "It always comes as something of a shock, but you'll get used to it."

"Get used to it?" Marty asked fiercely. "Get used to what?"

The Devil chose to change the subject. "You're quite a gambler, you know? That bounce off that refreshment stand they're building—that really had me humping, believe me!" He looked reproachful. "Let's keep them within reason, shall we?"

"You were there?" Marty asked incredulously.

"Of course I was there," said the Devil, disdainfully. "Naturally, I always watch my investments." He suddenly seemed to understand Marty's question. "Oh! No, I wasn't there in this form, of course. I was there in the form of a man. Otherwise people would get confused," he explained.

Marty stared across the table, trying to focus his eyes on the mist.

"Look," he said at last, picking his words with care, "last night maybe I was pretty tired. I'd driven over four hundred miles to get here, and I'd had a drink or two on an empty stomach on the way. Plus what I had after I got here." He hesitated a moment and then plunged. "Maybe I said something out of turn, but if I did, I'm sorry. If I made any deal, forget it."

The Devil giggled.

"You're quite a kidder, aren't you?" he said. He made a vague movement that resembled nothing as much as a swirl of fog, but to Marty's confused eye it almost appeared as if the other were con-

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sulting a wristwatch. "Well, keep up the good work. Just wish 'em where you want 'em. I'll do the rest."

The swirl darkened and then faded. Marty was alone.

"Buddy-boy is talkin' to hisself again," said the young bartender.

"So let him talk," said the old bartender with glee. "Let him whistle Dixie if he wants." He did a fast buck-and-wing beneath the protective cover of the battery of beer faucets. "See what he done today? Six under par and two under the field! Man, oh man, oh, man! Two under the youngsters!" He did a slight shuffle-off-to-Buffalo. "How I'd love to see him clobber those infants! How I'd love it! Two under the field!"

"Two under the field?"

"That's what I said! Two under!"

"Well, don't look at me like I was no moron or somethin'," said the young bartender resentfully. "Two under the field don't mean nothin' to me. I don't know one end of a golf from another. . . ."

The second day the groupings were the same, but Marty's threesome had been scheduled for later in the day, and now a small portion of the gallery accompanied them. Under these circumstances the amateur couldn't do anything right, and he chopped his way down the fairway morosely, grumbling to himself. The small-time pro, on the other hand, inspired by Marty's example and happy to see his favorite winning, was playing over his head and even beginning to get visions of placing in the top ten. Marty glumly hit his fantastic shots and dropped his incredible putts, paying no attention to the gasps of the awe-stricken gallery. By the end of nine, he was three more under par and had widened his lead over Carter by an additional stroke.

As he came to the tenth tee, Marty paused to think. Why did it necessarily have to be some supernatural agency that was controlling his magnificent shots? After all, he'd played some pretty top golf in his day without the help of anyone, and what made him suddenly believe in ghosts or devils? Just because he happened to be having a series of rounds that any professional golfer might put together when everything was working. He waggled his club, relief flooding him at the thought, and decided to prove he had been a fool.

He glanced down the fairway. To the left, and at least three hundred yards from the tee, a finger of the lake poked out towards the fairway. He nodded and commanded the ball. Hook into that tiny spit of water, he said silently, and then took both the stance and the grip for an extreme slice. He'd have trouble recovering from the lie that would result from the slice, but it was worth it to know. He

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swung; there was a gasp from the gallery. The ball fled from the clubhead, hooking just enough to carry it to the water. A cold hand seemed to grip Marty's stomach, twisting cruelly. Not only was the thing he had feared true, but he had lost two valuable strokes to Carter, who had been playing almost perfect golf! Marty blanked his mind to the significance of the experience, and bent down to tee up another ball. This time he stared straight down the fairway to a clear spot in the middle and swung. This time the ball was more obedient.

By the end of the eighteen holes for that day, he had managed to recover the two strokes lost so stupidly by his shot into the pond, but his lead over Carter had been cut to one stroke. He handed his putter to his caddy silently and ducked into his battered Chevy. For some reason he didn't feel like facing the sudden-friends at the big board, or hear the congratulations of the other players in the locker room. He wanted to be alone.

As he sat in his accustomed place in the last booth of the darkened bar that night, he waited impatiently for his visitor. As his thick fingers twiddled nervously with the glass before him, he reviewed arguments, threats, anything to get out of the spot in which he found himself. Now look here, he said to his imaginary booth-companion: if I can hit them where I want, what's to prevent me from putting them all in the pond? I did it once today, didn't I? Under your conditions I can lose this thing just as easily as I can win it. After all, second money is still a young fortune to me. So why don't we make a deal . . . ?

The word stuck in his mind. They already had a deal; that was the trouble. He sighed and drank deeply, peering across the table, but the clear-cut back of the plastic seat was all that was facing him.

Come on! Get here! Let's clear this thing up! his mind whispered to his missing tormentor. Let's get it over with. If you won't let me out of this stupid arrangement, I'll throw the match. I swear I'll throw it! I promise I'll lose!

He sighed. He wouldn't and he knew it. Not after over ten years on the skids; not after beating from tournament to tournament in that damn falling-apart Chevy, praying for a fifteenth, or even a twentieth place sometimes, just to pay for coffee and cakes. He couldn't and he knew he couldn't. And especially not to lose to Carter. He reached for his glass again, his hand shaking. Damn! Damn! Damn! How did I ever get myself in a mess like this?

He was still waiting alone at 2 AM when they closed the bar.

"Buddy-boy ain't talkin' to hisself tonight," said the young bartender. "Musta had a bad day."

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"Bad day?" said the old bartender jubilantly. "Bad day? Nine under par and still one up on Carter and you call that a bad day?" He looked at the young bartender witheringly. "A bad day is what your mother had when you was born!"

For the final day's round the tournament committee re-arranged the match to put the top three contenders together as usual, scheduling them for a tee-off time that would allow them to hit the fifteenth tee in time for the TV cameras to meet their commercial obligations. Marty stood on the first tee with Carter and Jamison while the gallery sized them up with that unconscious self-aggrandizement of people within touching distance of the great.

"That Marty Russell sure looks like he was out on one hell of a toot last night," one spectator said to another.

"He should worry," said the second. "The way he's playing, he should worry! Maybe he plays better when he's bushed."

Jamison leaned over and set his tee firmly in the ground, placed his ball on top of it, and rotated it until the brand mark was up. He straightened up, and smiled over his shoulder.

"Let's see if I can get one of those Russell specials," he said, and laid one far down the fairway.

Marty came up next. "Show you how I used to play when I was young and healthy," he said, but his heart wasn't in it. He swung at the ball listlessly, placing it fifty yards ahead of Jamison's.

Carter teed up. "Not bad, Pops," he said. "I always did say that goof-pills will beat skill any day. . . ." He put one a bit behind Marty's ball, and the three men filed off the tee with Marty in the rear, his face white, his jaw clenched almost painfully. No, sir! he thought. Not to Carter . . . !

It was more or less a repeat on the front nine. Marty played each shot as if disinterested, and by the time they had holed out on the ninth, he had added one shot to his lead over Carter and two to his lead over Jamison. It was as they were teeing off from the tenth that Jamison said something that caught Marty's attention. His head came up.

"What?"

"I said, we'll have to be careful of that gallery," Jamison said. "They're beginning to get out of the marshall's control, wandering all over the fairway."

Marty was teeing up at the time.

"Show us one of those Russell miracle shots," Carter said sarcastically. "Bounce it off some character's head right onto the green, like you did at the second hole the first day." He shook his head. "Lucky for you I was there, because otherwise I'd never have believed it."

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Marty almost jerked on his backswing, but his ball still sailed out as if fired from a gun. Lucky for me Carter was there, eh? Was it possible? The way the guy was playing golf, it certainly was possible! But, no—the Devil could scarcely make the same deal with two people. . . . Still, there were such things as agents, and except for Carter, who else had been around the refreshment stand at the time? A couple of carpenters, working on it, and some other people. . . . It could be anyone. What a pity! If I could be sure it was Carter. . . .

As they stepped off the tee his mind was still busy. Even if it wasn't Carter, it had to be someone in the gallery, and Jamison's comment—no, it had actually been Carter's comment—had given him a wonderful idea. Bounce it off someone's head, eh? How about that? Old wispy said he watched his investments, and do you have any idea what a well-hit golf ball can do to a man's head? Especially from up close? Well, well, what do you know . . . ?

The problem, of course, would be where to pull it. The eleventh was no good: a water hole that kept the gallery well back from the fairway. And the twelfth just didn't seem to suit. Marty reviewed the possibilities of each hole as he played. His game remained as flawless as ever, but his brain was racing, concentrating on his problem. The sixteenth might do, but the best place without a doubt would be the eighteenth. Of course if you failed, there wouldn't be another chance, but—but how could you fail? Or who was going to? The eighteenth it was! The gallery would all be crowded around the green, and old pal—whether he was Carter or not—would be sure to be there.

He smiled grimly as he perfected the plan, unaware that the odd look on his face was puzzling the gallery that marched along with him. That was how it would be: an unfortunate accident on the eighteenth green. After that, of course, he would be too upset to finish the round. It would cost him the tournament, but he wouldn't have lost, and that was the important thing. If his target was Carter, then Jamison would win—and he liked that idea. And if Carter was *not* his target, then let the smug little bastard pick up the dough—the money was no longer important. The fact remained that Carter would not have won; he would have been handed the prize in default. . . .

When they came to the eighteenth, Marty studied the lie carefully, biting his lip in concentration. It was a straightaway hole, four hundred and sixty yards to a saucer-like green nestling alongside the clubhouse. Behind the green was a tall television tower; to the left of the green, a deep trap.

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But it was the right side of the green that Marty studied; it was as if he had never seen it before, the way he looked at it now. That sharp spur of rocks that had given the club its name. . . . Lovely. Exactly as he remembered it. Perfect. . . .

The gallery had rushed ahead and now stood jammed, encircling the final green. In the distance the crowd looked like a multicolored collar about the smooth green, ruffled a bit where it bent around the trap and the rock spur. Very pretty, Marty thought with a grim twist of his lips. Prettiest thing I've seen in the past four days.

No eagle here, nor any par. This was a hole that wasn't going to be finished. A topped drive to begin with, about a hundred and twenty yards. That would give him an excuse to be short of the green on his second, but close enough to be in a good position to do real damage with a low iron. Wish them where you want them, eh? That's just what we'll do. . . .

He teed up his ball as his opponents watched, went into his accustomed backswing, and swung downwards. The ball obediently dribbled one hundred and twenty yards before the tee. There was a sharp gasp from the gallery spread along the fairway; it was his first missed shot of the tournament.

"What's the trouble?" Carter asked as he teed up. "Getting nervous this close to the payoff?"

Marty clamped his jaws on the first words that came to his lips. Keep it cool! he said to himself almost viciously. Let him have his rope; let either one of them have their rope! He was shaking as he walked to his ball; he had to force himself to calmness, to keep his plan in mind. Now, let's see. . . . A three-wood would look logical, and would bring the ball to about fifteen yards from the green. But not in front of the trap; it would be too illogical to take a low iron there. And the left side was better, anyway; the greatest portion of the crowd was there. Assuming that Carter wasn't his man. . . . Of course the crowd would be disappointed, figuring he should reach from there, but they'd have to live with their disappointment. He took his three-wood from his caddy, made a great pretense of swinging as hard as he could, and laid the ball exactly fifteen yards from the green, a bit to the left.

He felt an unusual mixture of icy calmness and bubbling excitement as he came up to his ball, and then paused at the sudden scream from the crowd. Carter had dropped his approach! A wave of applause broke wildly from the gallery. For a second Marty felt again that cold feeling he knew so well, and then he smiled bitterly to himself. So I could drop mine to win, he thought. So what? If he's my target, let them pay off to his widow. If he isn't, let him win!

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Both Carter and Jamison were on the green, watching him. He glanced with veiled eyes at the gallery; they presented a mosaic of one-face, a mass of colorful curiosity watching him. You're here, he thought. Either on the green or behind it. I'll find you!

He affected to study his shot in the hushed silence, and then at last leaned toward his caddy. "Three-iron," he said quietly, and slipped the club from the bag before the caddy could question the choice. "Just roll it up," he said, half to himself, as if in explanation. The caddy shrugged. You didn't argue with a guy with the lowest score ever recorded in an Open.

Marty glanced once in the direction of the green, where Carter seemed to be watching him with secret amusement. For one second Marty stared, and then bent to address his ball. Maybe you, maybe not. It makes no difference. In the silence that held the frozen gallery, he placed the clubhead back of the ball. His mind was ice and fire at the same time. Then suddenly it seemed to clear; his brain was a funnel of twisting light shapes, and a brilliant point of clarity peeped at him from the open end. Find him! he prayed. The one that got me into this horrible mess—find him and kill him! Kill him! *Kill him!*

He felt his arms being lifted as by an outside force, felt the clubhead come whirling through. As he felt the solid impact of the club against the ball, he smiled secretly; he had never hit a ball as well or as hard in his life. . . .

Too much sleeping-juice drunk in too many crummy motels over the years, they play hell with the reflexes. Marty didn't even hear the sharp gasp of the gallery, or the woman's high scream as the ball came back from the rock spur. When his head came up, the ball seemed to be waiting for him. For one split second it seemed to hover before his eyes; then it came on.

And, of course, he was in no condition to see that odd bounce, and see the ball trickle over, still spotted with red, and drop into the waiting cup. . . .

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THE PREDICTED METAL

by Isaac Asimov

I FREQUENTLY RECEIVE LETTERS FROM READERS WHO ATTEMPT to find some insight into the mysteries of nature by shuffling facts or supposed facts into some kind of pattern. Very often, the readers are not professionals or experts in the subject they are trying to handle.

My own impulse, then, is to reject such attempts out of hand—but I never quite dare. I invariably ponder before answering, and even when I finally decide they are all wrong, I try to make my response a polite one. After all, one can never tell, and I have a peculiar horror against going down in scientific history as the man who laughed at So-and-so.

For instance, there is the man who laughed at John Alexander Reina Newlands, and I would gladly point the finger of scorn at him if I only knew his name.

Newlands was born in 1837 of an English father and an Italian mother, and he remembered his Italian ancestry well enough to fight with Garibaldi in 1860 for the unification of Italy. He was interested in both chemistry and music and eventually became an industrial chemist specializing in sugar refining. In his spare moments, he turned his attention from sugar to the elements.

One had to wonder about the elements in those days. By 1864, about sixty different elements were known; elements of all kinds, sorts and varieties. There seemed no logic to the list, however, no order. There seemed no way of predicting how many elements there might be altogether, and for all anyone could say in 1864, the number might be infinite. Chemists were growing more and more depressed over the matter.

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If there were vast numbers of elements of all kinds, the Universe would be unbearably complicated.

It is almost an article of faith with scientists that the Universe is orderly and, basically, simple. Therefore, there had to be some way of finding order and simplicity in the list of elements.—But how?

Newlands amused himself by juggling the elements in various ways. Over the preceding few decades, chemists had been carefully working out the atomic weights of the elements (that is, the relative masses of their respective atoms), and those figures now seemed hard and reasonably accurate. Why not, then, arrange the elements in the order of atomic weight?

Newlands did so, then listed them in a table seven elements in width. First, there were the seven elements of lowest atomic weight; then, under them, the next seven, and so on. It seemed to Newlands that certain groups of elements of very similar properties fell in vertical lines when this was done, and that this was significant.

Could it be that elemental properties repeated themselves in groups of seven? His musical interests led him irresistably to remember that the notes of the scale repeated themselves in groups of seven. The eighth note was almost a duplicate of the first (see MUSIC TO MY EARS, October 1967). Musical notes repeated themselves in octaves, in other words, and might not the same be true of the elements?

Newlands therefore wrote up his results in a paper presented for publication to the English Chemical Society and referred to his discovery as the "Law of Octaves."

The Society rejected it with contempt, very much as they might if I had submitted one of my F & SF articles for similar publication. To be sure, it had to be admitted that Newlands' table was quite imperfect, for although some very similar elements fell into columns, some extraordinarily *dis*-similar elements did the same.

However, what really bothered the Society, I am sure, was the whole notion of playing games with elements and making tabular arrangements. The very notion of listing the elements in order of atomic weight seemed a trivial trick, and one chemist (this is the wise-guy referred to in the introduction) asked Newlands why he didn't try to list the elements in alphabetical order and see what kind of a table he could squeeze out of that. I only hope the gentleman lived long enough to have to swallow his words. It would only have taken eleven years.

Actually, two years earlier (and quite unknown to Newlands) a French geologist, with the formidable name of Alexandre Emile Beguyer de Chancourtois, had also tried to list the elements in order of atomic

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weight. Instead of making a table, he imagined the list of elements wound helically about a cylinder. In this manner, he got much the same results Newlands had obtained in his table, but in nowhere nearly as simple a manner.

Beguyer wrote a paper on the subject and included a painstaking diagram of what his cylinder of elements would look like. The paper was published in 1862 but the complicated diagram was omitted. The omission of the diagram made the article impossible to follow. This was all the more so, since Beguyer de Chancourtois was a poor writer who made free use of geological terms that were unfamiliar to chemists. His paper was completely ignored.

Despite the dangerous possiblity of being laughed at, chemists continued, occasionally, to try to wring order out of the list of elements. As the 1860's closed, two men, independently, each made a try. One was a German named Julius Lothar Meyer and the other a Russian named Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleev.

Matters had grown more subtle in the five years since Newlands. Both the German and the Russian arranged elements in order of atomic weight, but both used other atomic properties as additional guides. Without going into detail here, I can say that Meyer made use of atomic volume and Mendeleev used valence.

Each man noted that when the elements were arranged in order of atomic weight, the other properties (such as atomic volume and valence) rose and fell in an orderly manner. They recognized further that the period of rise and fall did not always involve the same number of elements. At the start of the list the period was seven elements long but later, it grew longer. It was one of Newlands' errors that he tried to make the length of the period invariable, and that helped make it inevitable that dissimilar elements would fall into the same column.

Both Meyer and Mendeleev succeeded in publishing their work. Mendeleev managed to get into print first, publishing in 1869, while Meyer published in 1870. One might expect that Mendeleev, a Russian, would lose out even so because, in general, European chemists did not read Russian, and Russian discoveries were usually ignored in consequence. However, Mendeleev was foresighted enough to publish in German.

Even so, Mendeleev and Meyer might still have received joint credit, were it not for the difference in their approaches. Meyer was timid. Not at all eager to compromise his scientific career by stepping out too far ahead of the front lines, he advanced his conclusions in the form of a graph relating atomic volume to atomic weight. He made no attempt at

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interpretation, but let the graph speak for itself, which it did but softly.

Mendeleev, however, actually prepared a "periodic table of the elements" as Newlands had done, one in which the various properties varied in a periodic manner. Unlike Newlands, Mendeleev refused to allow any of the columns to contain unfitting elements. If an element seemed about to fall into a column which it didn't fit, Mendeleev moved it to the next column, leaving behind an empty hole.

How explain the empty hole? Mendeleev pointed out boldly that it was quite obvious that not all elements had yet been discovered and the empty hole contained one of these undiscovered elements. Newlands had made no allowance for undiscovered elements. As for Meyer, his graph was so arranged that "holes" did not stand out, and Meyer himself later admitted he would never have had the courage to argue as Mendeleev had done.

From the properties of the remaining elements in the column with the empty hole, Mendeleev went on to insist he could even predict the properties of the undiscovered elements. He selected, in particular, the holes that were under the elements aluminum, boron, and silicon in his early tables. These holes, he said, contained undiscovered elements which he provisionally named "eka-aluminum," "eka-boron," and "eka-silicon" respectively.

("Eka" is the Sanskrit word for "one," so that the name implies the "first element under aluminum" and so on. Since "dvi" is the Sanskrit word for "two," the two holes under manganese would be "eka-manganese" and "dvi-manganese" respectively. These are the only cases I know of where Sanskrit has been used in scientific terminology.)

Consider eka-aluminum, for instance. Judging from the rest of the column and from its position in the list generally, Mendeleev decided that its atomic weight would be about 68; that it would have a moderate density of 5.9 times that of water; that it would have a low melting point but a high boiling point; and that it would have a variety of carefully specified chemical properties.

The rest of the chemical world reacted to this with anything from a laugh of indulgent amusement to a snort of contempt. Playing with elements, and building complicated structures out of them, was bad enough, but describing elements one had never seen on this basis seemed like nothing more than mysticism—or even charlatanry.

I wonder if Mendeleev might not have been saved from worse criticism by the fact that he was Russian. Westerners must have felt indulgent toward the ravings of mystical Russians, and tolerated there what they would not have tolerated among their own countrymen.

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But let's shift the focus to France again and to another Frenchman with a formidable name—Paul Emile Lecoq de Boisbaudran. He was a self-educated young man of means, fascinated with chemical analysis, and particularly attracted by the new technique of spectroscopic analysis in which heated minerals could be made to produce spectra composed of lines of differently colored light. Each element produced its own spectral lines distinct to itself.

This technique had been introduced in 1859 (something worth an article to itself someday), and its developers had almost at once found minerals yielding spectral lines not produced by any known elements. Orthodox chemical investigation into the minerals producing these lines demonstrated the existence of two new elements: cesium and rubidium.

Lecoq de Boisbaudran burned to discover elements, too, and moving into the field at the first announcement, he spent fifteen years subjecting every mineral he could get his hands on to spectroscopic analysis. He carefully considered the lines he obtained and moved intelligently in the direction of those minerals most apt to give him the new elements he wanted.

Finally he chanced upon a mineral which had been known to early mineralogists as "galena inanis" or "useless lead ore." It was useless because it was a mixture of zinc sulfide and iron sulfide and procedures designed to get out the lead it didn't contain naturally failed. It is now called "sphalerite" from a Greek word meaning "treacherous" because it so often deceived the early miners.

This ore was anything but useless or treacherous to Lecoq de Boisbaudran, however. In February 1874, he subjected the mineral to spectroscopic analysis and spotted two lines he had never seen before.

He hastened to Paris where he repeated his experiments before important chemists and established his priority. He then began working with larger quantities of the mineral and by November, 1875, worked it down to a gram of a new metal, enough to present some to the Academy of Sciences in Paris and to run chemical tests on the rest.

The new metal proved to have an atomic weight just under 70. It had a density of 5.94 times that of water, a low melting point of 30° C. a high boiling point of nearly 2000° C., and it showed a variety of specific chemical reactions.

This had no sooner been announced when Mendeleev, far away in Russia, pointed out excitedly that what Lecoq de Boisbaudran was describing was precisely the eka-aluminum that he had deduced from his periodic table five years before.

The chemical world was thunderstruck. Mendeleev's prediction of the

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properties of eka-aluminum existed in print. Lecoq de Boisbaudran's description of the properties of his new element existed in print. The two tallied almost exactly in every detail.*

There was no denying it. Mendeleev had to be right. The periodic table had to be a useful description of the order and simplicity behind the elements.

If there was any doubt, the other two elements described by Mendeleev were also found within a few years and predictions were again found to tally with the fact. As all the ridicule had fallen on Mendeleev before and none on Meyer, so now all the credit went to Mendeleev. In 1906, just a few months before his death, Mendeleev almost received the Nobel Prize, losing out by just one vote to Moissan, the discoverer of fluorine (see DEATH IN THE LABORATORY, September 1965).

Both Newlands and Beguyer de Chancourtois lived to see themselves vindicated. After Beguyer de Chancourtois died in 1886, a French journal, in remorse, published his diagram of the cylinder, the one that had not been published thirty years before. And in 1887, the Royal Society finally gave Newlands a medal for the paper which the Chemical Society had refused to publish.

As for the element discovered by Lecoq de Boisbaudran, he took the privilege of the discoverer and named it. Out of noble patriotism, he named it for his native land. For this he turned to ancient Rome and used the Latin name, Gallia ("Gaul" in English) so that the new element became "gallium."

Yet was it patriotism, pure and unalloyed? "Lecoq" in English is "the cock," and that noble barnyard fowl is "gallus" in Latin. Well, then, was gallium named for Gallia, the nation, or for gallus, the discoverer himself? Who can say?

So we have gallium at last. I have been promising to talk about gallium for two articles (see THE FIRST METAL, December 1967, and THE SEVENTH METAL, January 1968) and it is now time to do so.

Gallium is not an extremely common element, but on the other hand, it isn't a particularly uncommon one, either. It is about as common as lead, which makes it about thirty times as common as mercury and three thousand times as common as gold. Unfortunately, gallium is much more evenly spread out through the earth's crust than any of these other

Lecoq de Boisbaudran first got a figure of 4.7 for the density, but Mendeleev insisted that that could not be so. And he was right. The Frenchman's first samples were too impure. After proper purification, the density figure matched the prediction. A discrepancy in which the prediction won out over the first observation made the situation even more dramatic.

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elements, so that there are few places indeed where it can be found in sufficient concentration to make its extraction practical.

Its richest source is a mine in Southwest Africa, and even there the ore is only about 0.8 percent gallium (as compared, though, with a usual figure of 0.01 percent). Several thousand pounds of metal are all that are produced in the course of a year.

The most spectacular property of gallium is its melting point, which is 29.75° C. (or 85.55° F.). This means that it is usually solid, but will melt on a hot summer day. Notice, too, that its melting point is below the normal temperature of the human body (37° C. or 98.6° F.). This makes it possible to perform a dramatic experiment.

You begin with a rod of solid gallium. That's a moderately expensive proposition right there, for the present cost of gallium is something like $50 an ounce.—Oh, well, you *borrow* a rod of solid gallium.

Naturally, you choose a day when the temperature is in the 70's and you hold the rod in a pair of cool tongs. Now bring the end of the gallium rod down into the palm of your hand and leave it there.

Slowly, the warmth of your hand suffices to melt the gallium. The rod shrinks, and gathering in your palm will be a puddle of a silvery liquid that looks like mercury. No other pure metal will produce this effect, and it is quite creepy to watch something that looks like steel puddle up in that manner.

Liquid gallium is perfectly safe to hold, but is less than half as dense as mercury so it doesn't have the latter element's unusual weight. Furthermore, liquid gallium wets glass as mercury does not, which deprives the former of some interesting effects.

The melting point of gallium can be lowered still further if it is mixed with other comparatively low-melting metals. With the proper admixture of indium and tin, an alloy with a melting point as low as 10.8° C. (51.4° F.) can be produced. It can replace mercury for frictionless electric contacts with moving parts.

Once gallium melts, it freezes again only with reluctance, even if it is cooled quite a bit. It will stay liquid even in an ice bath. However, if a piece of solid gallium is dropped into such "supercooled" liquid gallium, the solid acts as a "seed" about which the gallium atoms line up in orderly fashion, so that the liquid solidifies at once.

In the case of most substances, the liquid form is less dense and more voluminous than the solid form. A liquid therefore generally shrinks when it solidifies. There are several exceptions to this, however, and the most important of them is water.

Where liquid water has a density of 1.00 grams per cubic centi-

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meter, ice has a density of 0.92 grams per cubic centimeter. This means that ten cubic inches of liquid water will freeze to form eleven cubic inches of ice. The pressure required to shrink that ice back to ten cubic inches is enormous. If water is allowed to freeze in a closely fitting sealed container, that enormous pressure must be exerted on the ice to keep it from expanding. There are few containers that can do so, and even strong ones will shatter.

Gallium is another exception. The density of the liquid is 6.1 grams per cubic centimeter, while that of the solid is 5.9. This means that 29 cubic inches of liquid gallium will freeze to 30 cubic inches of solid. The pressures developed are not as enormous as in the case of water, but they are large enough. For that reason, gallium is shipped in flexible containers of rubber or plastic. If, in the course of shipping, the metal melts and resolidifies, the containers bulge and distort rather than break.

Gallium is remarkable not only for its low melting point, but also for its high boiling point. It boils at 1983° C., so that at ordinary temperatures, or even at a red heat, it produces insignificant quantities of vapor. In this it is quite different from mercury, which boils at 357° C. and which produces sizable amounts of vapor even at ordinary temperatures. Mercury vapor is toxic, which means that the metal should be handled with considerable care. Gallium, on the other hand, poses no problems of that sort at all.

This combination of low melting point and high boiling point on the part of gallium raises a point.

Mercury is used in thermometers because it is liquid throughout the ordinary range of temperatures in which chemists are interested. To record temperatures below —39° C. chemists have to use alcohol thermometers, for ethyl alcohol doesn't freeze until a temperature of —117° C. is reached. For temperatures lower still, other dodges are used.

What about temperatures in the ranges higher than a mercury thermometer can handle? For that we need some substance which will not change with heat (an element is safer than a compound in this respect); that will be liquid through part of the liquid range of mercury and that will remain liquid at temperatures as high as possible.

In other words, what elements have melting points lower than 357° C. and boiling points higher than 357° C.? There are exactly fourteen of them and I am going to arrange them in order of decreasing length of temperature range over which they remain liquid:

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Element	*Melting Point (°C)*	*Boiling Point (°C)*	*Liquid Range (degrees)*
Tin	232	2270	2038
Gallium	30	1983	1953
Indium	156	2000	1844
Lead	327	1620	1293
Bismuth	271	1560	1289
Thallium	302	1457	1155
Lithium	186	1336	1150
Sodium	98	880	782
Potassium	62	760	698
Rubidium	38	700	662
Cesium	28	670	642
Selenium	217	688	471
Cadmium	321	767	446
Sulfur	113	445	332

As you see, three of the elements listed have a liquid range close to 2000 degrees. This is very unusual, for there are no others like them in the entire list of elements. (There are, to be sure, a number of elements that remain liquid for 2000 degrees and more, but that have their liquid range in a very high and inconvenient spread of temperature. Osmium, for instance, remains liquid for 2600 degrees from 2700° C. to 5300° C. That's pretty useless.)

For the "high, but useful" range, which would take us up to 2000° C., we have just the three elements: tin, gallium and indium, in that order.

As it happens, none are elements which are available in large quantity, but then large quantities are not needed for thermometers. Of the three, gallium is the lowest melting and therefore far the easiest to handle in a technique that must use liquid in filling the thermometer.

For that reason, gallium thermometers have indeed been used. As the fine column of mercury is enclosed by glass in the ordinary thermometer, so the fine column of liquid gallium is enclosed by quartz in the gallium thermometer. Such gallium thermometers are particularly useful in the range from 600 to 1500° C.

Gallium is proving to be useful in all sorts of solid-state devices, for which purpose it must be prepared (and is) with impurity concentrations of not more than one part in a million.

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One of its compounds, gallium arsenide (GaAs) can be used in solar cells, converting sunlight directly into electric current. It can be used as a semiconductor and in transistors at temperatures beyond those at which more ordinary devices of that sort will work. There is every reason to think it can be used to produce a laser beam.

There is no doubt but that gallium can make a satisfactory splash in the new world of far-out science, but nothing that happens to it is likely to outweigh the glamor and significance of the manner of its discovery.

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Special Reprint Feature:

THE VEILED FEMINISTS OF ATLANTIS
by Booth Tarkington

INTRODUCTION BY SAM MOSKOWITZ

Booth Tarkington has been poised near to greatness for his insights into the psychology of young boys and teenagers, as expressed in such treasured bestsellers as PENROD *(1914) and* SEVENTEEN *(1916). His* MONSIEUR BEAUCAIRE *(1900) and* THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS *(1918) achieved extraordinary popularity; the latter received a Pulitzer prize for its sympathetic portrayal of a young midwesterner "betraying" a great family name. He again received the Pulitzer prize for* ALICE ADAMS *(1921), concerning an enterprising young lady who resorts to attempting elaborate explanations of the deficiencies of her middle-class background in order to win a man she considers desirable.*

Because he so well understood and expressed the lives and psychology of the middle-class of his era, his work was in turn beloved by them. This led to his receiving The Howells Medal in 1943 for "general distinction in the field of literature."

Stories have circulated that Booth Tarkington was a science fiction buff, who was enthralled by a good fantastic yarn. Such stories have popped up just often enough to appear to have some basis in fact. Naturally, the science fiction world was more than ready to welcome so exalted a writer as one of their own, but most of the evidence, up until now, was little more than hearsay.

The best supporters had been able to come up with was Booth Tarkington's introduction to NEW LANDS *by Charles Fort (1923). This was Fort's second book, cataloguing, as did the first,* BOOK OF THE DAMNED *(1919), strange phenomenon and offering almost heretical scientific views as to their origin.*

Tarkinton had read the earlier volume while ill in a hospital, mistaking it for a work on crime. He had written BOOKMAN, *in the manner of a missionary attempting to convert a heathen, practically demanding that Fort be given critical attention.*

Writing in his introduction to NEW LANDS *he said: "Here indeed was a brush 'dipped in earthquake and eclipse;' though the wildest*

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mundane earthquakes are but earthquakes in teapots compared to what goes in the visions conjured up before us by Mr. Charles Fort. For he deals in nightmare, not on a planetary, but on the constellational scale, and the imagination of one who staggers along after him is frequently left gasping and flaccid." He expressed gratitude "for passages and pictures—moving pictures—of such cyclonic activity and dimensions that a whole new area of a reader's imagination stirs in amazement and is brought to life."

He was one of the founders of The Fortean Society in 1931, and there was at least one strange parallel in the lives of the two men. Both went blind from eye conditions aggravated by excessive strain, and both recovered some use of their eyes after a period of treatment.

The foregoing was ample evidence that Tarkington was enthusiastic about concepts off the beaten track, but his interest in and reading of science fiction was still open to question until The Veiled Feminists of Atlantis *was rediscovered. The story had been written by him as a personal favor for the Fortieth Anniversary, March, 1926, issue of* Forum. *Probably for that reason he declared a brief moratorium on forms that he knew to be commercial and indulged himself. Copies of this issue were bound in hard cover, with the logo design and leading features printed in full-color and inset in the black cloth.*

The Veiled Feminists of Atlantis *was quite obviously intended to be a satire and allegory, based on the fact that emancipation of women had advanced to the point where they had been given the vote, taken to smoking, drinking, wearing short skirts and dancing the Charleston. Surely this was a harbinger of greater evil to come. To present his thesis, he utilized two major themes of science fiction so knowingly as to leave no doubt of his substantial familiarity with the form. The two major concepts employed were those of Lost Atlantis as a civilization in advance of ours and the equally familiar and always fascinating notion of women gaining control of the world.*

The obvious joy he received in employing the format of science fiction can be sensed in the tone of the story.

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THE VEILED FEMINISTS OF ATLANTIS

by Booth Tarkington

AMONG CERTAIN OCCULTISTS OF the esoteric Buddhist group there was once this tradition concerned with the sinking of Atlantis. The continent disappeared as the climax of a conflict between the practitioners of White Magic and those who were experts in Black Magic. Magic, which was of course only science kept secret, had gone far in Atlantis, and the magicians ruled the continent. The general populace was morally unfit to be trusted with knowledge of the discoveries made by initiated chemists, psychologists, electricians, and biologists, just as a portion of our people to-day are unfit to be trusted with automobiles and gunpowder; and therefore the Atlantean scientists were an organized secret society, keeping their knowledge strictly to themselves and using it for the general good. Of course they easily became the ruling class, and the government was naturally a dictatorship, probably a hidden one, so that the populace believed itself to be a governing democracy.

Apprentices to the magicians were carefully selected; only young men of promising intelligence combined with the highest sense of honor and the most humanitarian impulses could be permitted to acquire knowledge dangerously potential, but mistakes were made in selection; ambitious and prying outsiders obtained copies of some of the sacred books, deciphering them and possessing their meanings; there arose factions, too; and, moreover, some of the greatest among the magicians, or scientists, could not control their own human impulses, and used their knowledge for selfish ends. Thus the opposing camps were formed. On one side were the benevolent White Magicians, who wished to use the secrets of nature for the benefit of the world at large; and on the other were the Black Magicians, whose purpose was to secure power to fulfil their own desires.

In the conflict, forces so terrific were employed by both parties that at last the very continent was riven and sunk beneath the waters of the ocean; the White Magicians, in their gigantic despair, thus destroying not only themselves but

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all their world as well, in order to annihilate their enemies of the dark cohorts and to prevent the further dissemination of knowledge which man was not yet fitted to receive. This is to say, they perceived that civilization was a failure with them; that man was better dead than left in possession of knowledge (meaning power) ungenerously employed; that evolution had produced civilization too rapidly upon Atlantis, and must begin the work anew elsewhere.

Such, roughly, was the tradition, as I learned it from curious books years ago,—so many years ago, indeed, that it had passed almost altogether out of my mind when a chance meeting last winter with a French archæologist in the Djur Djurra mountains of the Atlas range recalled and freshened it. This was at Michelet, that surprisingly Alpine appearance among the Algerian clouds where the traveler expects to see Swiss chamois hunters descending the snowy peaks rather than robed and tatooed Arabs, and one must continually doubt that one is in Africa. Professor Paul Lanjuinais, of the Institute, was staying at the inn, and, beside the rather inadequate fire in the small smoking room, we fell into talk of the Kabyle people, or "White Arabs", among whom our own party had been motoring. M. Lanjuinais was in the Djur Djurra region for the purpose of research among the Kabyles, he informed us, and presently he mentioned the Atlantean theory of their heavily disputed origin.

"No single theory wholly accounts for the presence of a 'White Arab' here," he said. "Blue-eyed fair people in Africa are spoken of by Egyptian hieroglyphs and rather definitely assigned to this region; my own conclusion is that the Kabyles have been here a very long time. No one can say authoritatively that they may not spring from a flight migration from Atlantis. It is a possible thing, even a rather plausible one; but the same speculation,—for it is a speculation rather than a theory—has been made concerning the Basques, though the language roots of Kabyle dialects and Basque appear to have no relation. However, since if Atlantis existed it was of continental proportions, the peoples upon it were probably of widely different types, even if they were united under a common government." Here M. Lanjuinais paused to laugh. "Occult science, which formerly had an eccentric European prevalence, probably never touched American life, and so you are probably unaware of the occult tales of Atlantis, and do not know that some of the occultists believed themselves to be in possession of the true history of the sinking of the continent. You have never heard anything of that, have you?"

"It happens that I have," I said;

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and, as he spoke, my memory began to turn the legend up from the obscure stratum of recollections it had come to occupy in my mind. "I think it was this." And I repeated what I recalled of the tradition.

"Yes," he said, laughing again. "That was the substance of the occult vaporizing, if indeed substance may be attributed to what is so extremely tenuous a vapor. I think the occultists put their own rather forced interpretation upon a Berber story someone must have picked up hereabouts years ago and carried either to Europe or to India, perhaps to both."

"Hereabouts?" I asked. "Then there is some trace of a legend of Atlantis among the Kabyle people?"

"Not if one speaks carefully," he replied. "There is a story, yes; but one cannot say that it refers to Atlantis. It speaks of a Great Land to the West in the Waters. That might as well be America, except for the use of the phrase I translate as '*in* the waters', which seems to mean '*within* the waters'."

"You find this story among the Kabyles?"

"Yes. I came upon traces and variations of it here and there; but its best and most complete form appears among them in some of the hilltop villages nearer Bougie, toward the coast."

"How does it differ from the occultist form?"

"In several curious details," M. Lanjuinais replied; and he smiled as a man smiles over something that is between the whimsical and the ridiculous. "Most strikingly of all, it differs in ending with a question that no Kabyle has ever solved and is not to be solved by anyone else, I think."

"But what a strange thing!" I exclaimed. "For a legend to end with a question seems extraordinary."

"But not unique. I believe, however, that there are not many traditions leading to questions as their main point. This one does that. There may be some connection, too, with the fact that the Kabyles do not veil their women; though that is only another speculation, and the story doesn't directly touch upon it."

"What is the story?" I asked. "Would you mind telling us?"

"Not at all," Professor Lanjuinais replied. "It is not too long. In a general way it follows the contour of the occultist legend, especially in representing that governmental control of Atlantis gradually came into the hands of a secret society or sect to which admission was most difficult and involved years of trial, or neophytism. Of course the Kabyles speak of this governing organization as a tribe,—they call it the tribe of Wise People, which may well enough be taken to mean a society of educated persons, initiation tak-

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ing place upon the completion of education. The Kabyle legend describes them as all-powerful and, until the great dispute arose between the two factions, wholly benevolent. Under their rule, everybody was contented in the whole land. There was no war; public opinion consisted of a general sense of brotherhood; and disease was conquered, for the Wise People could remedy all bodily defects. Also, they could direct the minds and inclinations of the populace, so that there was no such thing as sin. In a word, the 'Great Land in the West' was heaven as a *fait accompli* except for the lack of one item: the people lived to be very old, but they were not immortal. Death was the only fact the Wise People had not conquered; but, save for that, you had a most excellent heaven conducted perfectly by a band of angels, the Wise People; for even heaven itself must be conducted by somebody, one is led to suppose. The invariable circumstance about any organization is that it has officers."

I interposed. "But aren't there some religious organizations?"

"They must have at least a janitor," M. Lanjuinais returned. "And almost always a treasurer. At all events, the Wise People, who of course lived on mountain tops, presumably in fastnesses of learning, ruled this legendary paradise. I think the occultist tradition follows its own purposes in tracing the cause of the dispute to a selfish use of science; but I prefer the Kabyle story, which gives a radically different reason for war."

"The Kabyle version doesn't give the factions as White and Black, benevolent and malevolent?"

"It gives the factions as White and Black," he answered, "but not as benevolent and malevolent. White and Black have no moral symbolic significance in the Kabyle legend; they are simply color designations, as were the Blue and the Gray in your own Civil War. In that war there was a geographical difference between the two parties; in the White and Black war there was no such line of cleavage; and one of the curious things about it was that every family of the Wise People was divided against itself. In every family there was at least one White member and one Black member, which naturally made the war a bitter one."

"But what caused the war, M. Lanjuinais?"

"I am approaching that," he responded amiably. "Allow me to reach it by degrees. I told you there appeared to be a possible relation between the legend and the fact that the Kabyle women go unveiled; but this I wish merely to suggest and not to emphasize. You have seen these women on the mountain sides, some of them quite handsome in spite of the tatooing upon their faces; and you have observed a few of them in

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the villages of the valley,—apparent anachronisms among the veiled Mohammedan women. You have caught the glance of these Kabyle girls and women,—a glance a little hard, a little hostile, and, within it, a glint of something wild and driven. A very ancient look, one might call it; a look possibly beset by some historical fear against which there is still rebellion. One might say that a Kabyle woman's eyes are the eyes of a woman who has seen her grandmother beaten to death, but has not been tamed by the spectacle. There is still an antique horror in this glance, and an old, old heritage of defiance. Where did they get such a look? Well, of course one does not need to go back to Atlantis for it; but if one were in a whimsical mood he might trace it to the war between the Whites and the Blacks in the 'Great Land to the West within the Waters'. You see, the curious thing about this war was that all the women were upon one side and all the men upon the other. The women were the Whites and the men were the Blacks."

"Dear me!" I said. "So ancient as that! But what was the point at issue?"

"Whether or not the women should wear veils."

"I see. The women insisted upon casting the veils away, and the men . . ."

"It is not so simple," he interrupted. "In the earlier days, when the Great Land was entirely peaceful, the initiates in knowledge, the Wise People, were all men. At that time the women were merely of the populace, governed benevolently like the rest; but little by little the wives and daughters of the initiates began to steal glimpses of the sacred books and to penetrate the mysteries. In other words, they began to seek education; and of course many of the initiates themselves taught a little magic,—or imparted scientific information,—to their wives and daughters. In those days all the women wore veils; or, as one might express it, they were 'thoroughly feminine'. Gradually, as they acquired more education, and felt more equal to occasions, more able to stand on their own feet, they did not wish to be or seem quite so feminine: some of the bolder among them laid aside their veils and showed their faces openly. Naturally, this caused a little grumbling among the men; but more and more women grew bold, until finally it was thought old-fashioned to wear a veil. Then the women demanded complete initiation into the mysteries of the Wise People. 'We know all about it anyhow,' they said to the men. 'We are your equals in fact, so why deny us the mere acknowledgment of our equality?' There was more grumbling, of course; but the women were initiated, and after that none

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of them wore a veil. They divested themselves, as it were, of all femininity, and made good their equal footing. Of course some of the men still grumbled: their vanity was not soothed when the women sometimes surpassed them in certain branches of learning and even in special feats of reasoning; but in a general way the men were just, and after a time they accustomed themselves to the new equality. They perceived that it was a necessity if they were to be fair,—although it cannot be said that they ever really liked it,—and within a generation the Wise People consisted of as many women as men. The daughters of the members of the organization were taught as well as the sons, and were initiated with an equal standing. Then, when everything seemed to be settled upon an apparently permanent basis, a strange and unfortunate thing happened. Fashions forever move in cycles; some of the women returned to the fashion of wearing veils. Immediately those who adopted the veil began to be a powerful party within the organization of the Wise People where all were supposed to be equal. They elected all the officers and controlled the organization itself; whereupon seeing their success, all the other women at once resumed the veil and joined them."

I interrupted the narrative of M. Lanjuinais at this point. "Did the men then adopt veils for themselves? Does the Kabyle story mention such a point?"

"No," he replied. "Men are not adapted to veils and are not screened by them. The men among the Wise People could not have helped themselves by wearing veils. But of course they could not endure what the women were doing to them. The men had accepted equality, they could not accept the new inequality; though at first they tried by peaceful means to remedy the disadvantage at which they had been placed. They held a great meeting to discuss the matter. 'You cannot be our equals,' they said to the women, 'and at the same time wear your feminine veils. That is worse than being unfair; it is treachery.'

"But the women laughed. 'When we formerly wore veils,' they said, 'we possessed something that we abandoned when we went unveiled. At the time, we did not perceive our loss, and it has taken us more than a generation to discover it. Now, in again veiling ourselves, we are merely reclaiming our rights,—resuming our natural possession.'

"'No,' the men returned. 'You cannot justly retain this so-called possession of yours, because it is an advantage. Equality means that no one seizes an advantage, and for you to seize this one destroys the equality we have given you and leaves us your inferiors. Our

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ideal is equality, and to maintain it we will either take the veils away from you or cease to initiate you into the mysteries of our magic and reduce you to your former state of mere usefulness to us.'

"At that the women laughed louder. 'We do not need initiation from you. We possess the mysteries and can do our own initiating. The feminine veil, so alluring and exhaling such charm, is natural to us; it is a part of our long inheritance, and we could not permanently give it up even if we wished to do so, since it is our very instinct to wear it. If it is your destiny that our attainments and our veiling are to make you our inferiors, you might as well accept it. We accepted our destiny for a long, long time.'

"But the men were unable to be so philosophic as their opponents suggested; in fact, it is related that by this time they were in a condition of the deepest resentment. 'You shall not wear veils,' they said. 'You have abused our sense of justice and insulted our generosity. You shall not wear veils. We have got to know what you are thinking about!'

"Now when the men said they had to take away the veils so they would understand what the women thought, the women raised such a shout of mocking and indignant laughter that the fighting began then and there. Toward morning the survivors withdrew to opposing fastnesses and began their war with sand storms, which they sent against each other. The Kabyles say the Whites and Blacks used mountain ranges and thunder and lightning as familiar weapons; that they hurled earthquake and tornado upon each other; and that in their last battle they shook the sun so that it rocked in the sky; and the moon, which until then whirled noisily in the heavens like a spinning top, was struck dumb and

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still, so that it never turned again, and we have only the one face of it always toward us. Then, as the ocean came over the land in waves thousands of feet tall, all the Wise People perished; for the men were determined to the last not to be made inferior by an injustice, and the women, even though they would have made peace at any time, still protested that even if they were willing, they could not give up the veil for it was their very nature itself. That is almost the end of the legend, but not the very end. As I told you, the end is a question; and when the story is told in the evening, in one of the Kabyle huts of stone on a mountain top, the narrator always concludes with the great question. And after that everybody goes to sleep."

"Is there ever any answer to the question?" I asked.

"The Kabyle people think not, and probably they are right. I have suggested that there is an apparent bearing upon it in the fact that the Kabyle women are unveiled and have that ancient driven yet hostile look in their eyes. You see, the tradition implies that the Kabyles escaped from the Great Land. They left at the beginning of the war, before the final cataclysm; but they were only a part of the uninitiated populace of the continent and not members of the Wise People. You perceive how easily it might be misleading to follow such a clue for an answer to the question."

"But what *is* the question?"

"I supposed of course it was obvious," M. Lanjuinais returned. "'Who won?'"

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